



Miramonti

Dorothy Dix



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Mirandy



"I des parades myself by 'em one mo' time."

Mirandy

By

Dorothy Dix *penname*

Gilmer, Elizabeth Meriwether "Mrs. G. O. Gilmer"
"



With illustrations by
E. W. Kemble



New York
Hearst's International Library Co.
1914

PS 3513
I 635 MS
1914

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Mirandy



Mirandy

I

The Good Old Summer Time

“YESSUM, I is jest got back from my summer vacation, an’ I’s ready to take yo’ wash ag’in.

“Yessum, I allus goes off on a summer vacation, an’ I gives Ike one, becaze I’s a merciful woman, an’ I believes dat ev’ry wife ought to let her husband git de chanst to slip de yoke of matermony ev’ry now an’ den, so as to ease his neck a little, an’ let de galled places git well.

“Yessum, after a man has done focht his pay-envelope home ev’ry Saturday night for a year, an’ has gone to roost wid de chickens, an’ has had to hold his breath when he come near his wife ef he has stopped by de corner saloon, an’ has wound up de clock an’ put de cat out of doors, he shorely does need a holiday. Yessum,

he's done earned hit, an' hit's a mighty measly, ornery kind of a wife dat'll begrudge hit to him.

"A woman dat won't let up on de henpeckin' once a year sho' am a po'-sperited creeter, an' when I hears 'bout dese devoted wives dat never has left dere husbands, nor let dere husbands out of dere sight, I sut'nly does feel my heart go out towards dem men in pity, an' lak sendin' in a hurry call for dat cruelty to animals s'ciety. Yessum, I reckons dat one of dese heah affectionate wives what a husband can't shake winter nor summer is one of de worst afflictions dat de good Lawd can send on a man.

"Dat's de reason dat ev'ry summer I takes a trip for Ike's health, becaze dere ain't nothin' in dis worl' dat peartens a man up so lak gittin' rid of his wife, even ef hit ain't but for two or three weeks, an' I allus notices dat when I gits back home off of my vacation Ike looks about ten years younger, an' lak he's done took de rest cure. He's dat spryed up an' cheered up dat you would think dat he was a fresh widower—an' dere certainly ain't nothin' dat seems to be so good for a man's health as losin' his wife.

"An' 'tain't no wonder dat a vacation, even when de wife takes hit, does de husband good. Hit's jest natchul. Time a man an' a woman

has lived togedder for 'leven months out of de year, dey has got enough, an' mo' dan enough, of each odder's company. Dey's told each odder ev'rything dey knows, an' de conversation kinder runs low in de bin, an' des to make talk dey begins to argufy, an' dat leads to scrappin', an' most gen'rally dey lands in de divorsh court, or de cop comes along an' runs 'em in for makin' a rough house.

"Becaze dere's dis funny thing about mattemony—bein' married is lak gazin' at de sun. After you has looked too long an' too steady at de partner of yo' bosom you don't see nothin' but spots. Dey is des covered wid blemishes ontil you can't see nothin' good in 'em, an' de best cure for hit is des to break away, an' go an' look at somethin' else ontil hit rests yo' eyes.

"Dat's de way wid me an' Ike. We sashays along mighty comfortable in double harness for a while, an' den some day I begins to feel lak I'll throw de coffee-pot at Ike's head ef he tells dat ole story one mo' time 'bout how he would have won de prize in de policy game ef only he had of had de right ticket. Den Ike he introduces de subject of infant immersion—a-knowin' dat I is a deep-water Baptist—dat we begun fightin' about befo' our fust baby was

born, an' dat is still good for a scrap after thuty years of warfare.

"Den Ike, he ups an' axes me ef I don't think dat I's a-takin' on flesh, an' I wonders ef Ike was as bow-legged when I married him as he is now, an' den hit's kinder proned into me dat de time has come for me or Ike, one or de odder, to git away somewheres, an' git off of de odder one's nerves. An' so I packs my carpet-bag an' lights out, an' when I starts off all dat I can see when I tells Ike good-by at de depot is a po', runty little nigger man, wid a bald head, an' stooped shoulders, an' crooked legs.

"But I ain't been gone mo' dan three days befo' he sorter begins to improve in my mind when I thinks about him, an' by de end of de fust week I finds dat I is a-braggin' to de women dat I meets up wid about what a fine, pussonable-lookin' man, wid an intellectual brow, dat I is married to, an' by de time I gits ready to come home dat ole nigger sut'nly does look good to me, an' I wouldn't trade him off for de finest young buck in town. Dat I wouldn't.

"An' hit's de same way wid Ike. Co'se Ike has got too good manners to tell me dat he's glad I's gwine away an' dat he is tired of wonderin' how he ever was fool enough to marry

a woman dat has got a figger lak a feather-bed, an' dat is so homely dat hit's a wonder dat she don't bust de lookin'-glass when she peeks in hit to see ef her bonnet is on straight. Naw'm, Ike acts lak a puffick gentleman, an' lies about how sorry he is dat I's gwine, an' tells me dat he will be mighty lonesome widout me. But he don't fool me none. Naw'm. Dere's a lot of resignation in his looks, an' I knows dat he's thinkin' dat he is gwine to play craps half de night, an' drink all de beer he can hold, an' dat hit's gwine to be mighty restful to come home at three o'clock in de mawnin', an' not find a woman waitin' up for him wid a flat-iron. Furdermo', I knows dat all Ike sees in me is a fat woman dat waddles as she walks, an' dat has got a tongue about a yard long.

"But I ain't been gone long befo' Ike finds out dat he ain't as good a crap-player as he thought he was, an' dat beer gives him de headache, an' dat he is most pizened hisself on his own cookin'; an' den hit begins to git sort of proned in on him dat a wife what keeps things clean an' neat, an' dat has got a master hand at cookin', is a sorter convenient thing to have aroun' de house, an' dat he's got out of de way of bein' a sport, anyhow.

"Den I comes home, an' you better believe he's glad to see me an' I's glad to see him, an' I don't notice dem bow legs of hissen, an' de very fust word dat he says to me is: 'Land of Goshen, Mirandy, how you is fell off! I declare to gracious, dere ain't none of dese heah young gals dat's got a figger lak yourn.'

"Yessum, a vacation shorely is a life-savin' station for matermony, an' I 'spectz dat ef hit warn't for de chanst dat we has to git away from each odder in de summer for a while dat most of us would bust de tie dat binds an' chafes so dat dere wouldn't be no patchin' of hit togedder no mo'. But dere's one thing dat I is thankful for, an' dat is dat de Recording Angel knocks off wuk an' shuts up shop in de summer time. Becaze ef he didn't most of us would have a through ticket for de place where hit's summer all de time. Yessum, we shorely would.

"Any way you looks at hit dere's one mighty funny thing about de summer time, an' dat is dat as de the'mometor goes up, folks's religion goes down, an' dey does things on de Fo'th of July widout winkin' an eye or turnin' a hair dat hit would des plumb scandalize 'em to even think about doin' at Chris'mus.

"Yessum, hit 'pears lak de hot weather kinder

melts down yo' principles, an' gives de Ole Boy a chanst, an' de fust news you knows you is segasuatin' out of de straight an' narrow path, an' is clippin' hit at a two-forty gate down de broad road of sin an' destruction. Dat you is. I knows becaze I has jest been dere.

"Yessum, here I is, a mother in Israel, what is de president of de Daughters of Zion, an' is set in de amen corner at chu'ch, an' wrastled wid de mourners for nigh on to thuty years. Mo'over, I's a respectable married woman wid a houseful of chillen, an' temperance convictions an' odder drawbacks to havin' a good time, an' in de winter I sut'nly is straight laced. I don't drink nothin' stronger dan lemonade, an' when Ike takes me to de show, an' one of dem hussies comes out to do a song an' dance in a dress dat ain't nothin' but a ruffle around de waist, an' a skimpy ruffle at dat, I's dat frustrated an' shocked dat I almost shuts my eyes, an' I holds my fan up befo' Ike's face.

"Yessum, it sho' am awful to me, an' ef anybody would come along about dat time an' prophesy dat in less dan six months dis two hundred and ten pounds of virtue would be a-wanderin' down de seashore in a frock dat warn't no bigger dan a postage-stamp, I sut'nly

would take de skillet to 'em. Dey shorely would 'a' wished dat dey had carried a accident policy ef dey had said dat thing to me, yet dat's exactly de kind of foolishness dat de summer time got me into doin' last week.

"An' dat ain't all. When I hears some men dat was a-standin' on de beach say dat I is built on de lines of a livin' picture, instead of callin' for de police lak I would in de winter, I des parades myself by 'em one mo' time—me, dat is a Christian wife an' mother!"

"An' what you think I done wid my W. C. T. U. badge? I put hit away, becaze I knowed dat I was gwine to need hit next winter when I was specherfyin' to de sinners 'bout de errors of dere ways in lookin' on de wine when hit is red, but you better believe dat I didn't go about wid any no-drink tag on me at de seashore, an' I 'spectz dat de rest of de temperance bregalia must have done de same way, becaze ef dere was any white ribbons flutterin' around I didn't see 'em."

"Dat's huccom when I meets up wid Br'er Ben, what is de deacon in my chu'ch, what takes up de collection an' leads de prayer-meetin', dat I warn't noways scandalized when he axed me to have a drink."

"Sis' Mirandy," says he, "I's a temperance



"I meets up wid Br'er Ben, what is de deacon in
my chu'ch."

man, an' de stand dat you is tooken against de Demon Rum is mighty nigh squashed de head of de monster, but bein' as how de day is hot, an' dat St. Paul recommended a little wine for de stomach's sake, I axes you to jine me in a glass of beer.'

"An' I spons dat I's always heered dat beer is mighty fine to ward off sunstroke, an' den we had one, an' den anodder, an' anodder, ontil I sort of lost count, but Br'er Ben say hit's all right for prohibitionists to drink all de beer dey wants in de summer, 'specially when dey is away from home where dey ain't knowed.

"Hit's dis way, Sis Mirandy," says Br'er Ben, an' I tell you dat Br'er Ben is a mighty edifyin' man, 'hit's dis way. You an' me is jest po' weak creeters dat is in de hands of de Lawd. In de winter we's strong in de faith 'caze we's all braced up wid de cold, but ef he sees fitten to send de sun in de summer an' take de stif'nin' out of our good resolutions, hit ain't for us to question de wisdom of hit. Mo'over in de winter you ain't got de thirst, but in de summer time all de objections dat I is got to de workin's of Providence is dat I ain't a giraffe wid a throat a mile long."

"An' dere's anodder funny thing about de sum-

mer time. What is hit dat makes folks break out wid lies and braggin' at de same time dat dey does wid prickly heat? Now jest look at me. I's a po', humble woman what takes in washin' when I's at home, an' I has to scuffle all I knows how to keep meat in de pot an' shoes on de chillen, but jest let me git away from home in de summer an' you'd think I was rollin' in riches. I jest lets go all hold on de truth an' spreads myself, an' I has to, to keep up wid de big talk of de odder women.

"Yessum, I bet dat de the'mometor was about ninety-nine in de shade de time dat Ananias an' Sapphira told dat whopper dat dey got struck dead for, an' hit's mighty lucky for folks dat de Lawd ain't takin' no such snap judgment nowadays on liars, 'caze ef he was to, dere'd be mighty few of us dat would live to git home from our summer vacation."

II

Visiting the Sick

“**Y**ASSUM,” said Mirandy as she sank weakly into her chair, “yassum, I reckon I does look a little frazzled out an’ pale around de gills. I know dat I feels dat way, an’ hit ain’t so much dat I’se had a little tech of chills an’ fever, wid de rheumatics an’ de misery in de back throwed in for good measure, dat is been de matter wid me as hit is dat I is had too much friends.

“Yassum, dat’s whut pulled me down, an’ lak to drove me into de grave. I could a stood de sickness widout de friends’ advice, or I could a stood de friends’ advice widout de sickness, but de mixtry was too much, an’ a little mo’ an’ I’d a-been makin’ Ike one of dese heah reconciled widowers dat you see all around you, an’ dat’s a thing dat I’se been fightin’ aginst doin’, for de thurty years wese been married, an’ dat I is opposed to doin’ on principle.

“I used to wonder whut was de good of visitin’

friends in time of sickness, but now I knows hit. Hit is to reconcile you to death.

"Fust to come was Sis' Tempy, who fetch a groan when she seed me, an' says:

"'You sho'ly do look bad, Sis Mirandy, but 'twarn't no surprise to me to hear dat you was took, for I'se been a-lookin' for hit for a long time. De very las' time I seed you mixin' up wid fried isters, an' chicken salad, an' cake, an' ice cream, an' pickles at de chu'ch fair I 'lowed to myself dat you sho'ly was diggin' yo' grave wid yo' teeth.'

"'Dere ain't nothin' de matter wid my stomach,' spons I, for I'se like ev'ybody else dat I ever seed, sort of' techy 'bout my appetite.

"'Well,' goes on Sis Tempy, 'you better diet an' des take a little limewater an' milk for a couple of months, becaze you never can tell how things is gwine to turn out, an' folks of yo' build goes off moughty sudden sometimes,' an' den Sis Tempy gathers up her knittin' an' goes home an' Sis Alviry drap in.

"'How do you feel dis mawnin', Sis Mirandy?' she axes. 'I heerd dat you was sick an' I des thought dat I would step in an' cheer you up a little. How does yo' symptoms seem to segasuate anyway?'

"I tells her dat I'se fust hot an' den cold, an' dat I'se got a powerful achin' in my bones.

"'Lawd, Lawd!' says she, 'ef dat ain't de ve'y way dat my Aunt Araminty was took down, an' dem was prezactly de words she used in describin' of her feelin's, an' hit warn't but fo' days befo' she was laid out, as sweet a corpse as you would ever wish to see, Sis Mirandy, an' a perfectly grand funeral dat would have been a comfort to anybody we give her, ef I do say hit as oughtn't to brag 'bout my own kin.'

"'But de doctor say dey warn't nothin' much de matter wid me,' I 'spons wid a kind of a weak feelin' in my knees an' around de pit of my stomach. 'He says dat as how I'll be up an' around in a day or two.'

"'Dat's whut de doctors always say,' 'spons Sis Alviry, becaze ev'ybody feels dat hit's deir duty to keep up de sperrits of de sick, an' I wouldn't say nothin' to depress you for de world, but hit's jest lak Is tellin' you. Aunt Araminty didn't seem to be sick much nuther, an' she was a-callin' for fried chicken not two hours befo' she died, an' she was a fat woman lak you be, too, Sis Mirandy; an' dey do say dat when dese heah hefty folks gets sick dey is moughty liable

not to pull through, becaze dey's so much of 'em to be sick.

" 'Howsomever, Sis Mirandy, as Brer Jenkins says, we's all got to go. We's heah to-day an' gone to-morrow, an' you has lived de good life, an' made yo' peace, an' I don't reckon dat a little matter of livin' twenty or thutty years mo' would make any difference to you, so don't let de thought dat maybe you won't pull through worry you none.'

"An' den Sis Alviry step over to de glass an' perk up her bonnet string, an' say dat she must be goin', as deir's some mo' sick folks dat she's got to go an' see, an' she feels hit de duty of de well an' hearty to carry rays of sunshine into de dark chambers of affliction. An' I spons dat she needn't linger no longer on my account, an' dat I'd ruther be a sensible corpse dan to be fool enough to go round talkin' to sick folks 'bout folks who died of de same disease dat dey's got.

"Well, no sooner is Sis Alviry gone off in a hump dan Sis Becky come tiptoein' in in a way dat made ev'y board in de floor creak, an' after she had past de time of day an' promulgated a few questions 'bout whut ailed me she axed me whut doctor I is got, an' I say dat I'se got

Doctor Jones, whut has been projectin' wid de constitution of my family for de las' ten years.

" 'My gracious!' 'claims Sis Becky, a-throwin' up her hands, 'but hit's a lucky thing for you dat de Lawd put hit into my heart to come an' see you dis day, for I'se jest in time to save yo' life.'

" 'Why so?' axes I.

" 'Becaze,' says Sis Becky, 'dere's des one doctor dat kin cure you, an' dat's my doctor. I wouldn't let dat Doctor Jones doctor a sick cat onless I was reconciled to losin' de cat.'

" 'Dere ain't none of us died yit under de manipulation of Doctor Jones,' 'spons I.

" 'Maricles can't always happen,' answered Sis Becky, 'nor luck hold out, an' hit's my opinion dat dis is whar hit will turn, an' dat ef you don't send for my doctor dat you'll be a dead woman by dis time to-morrow,' an' den she sets dere an' argifies wid me 'bout how her doctor is ole man know-it-all, an' my doctor is de fust aid to de cemetery, ontell she gets me dat flab-gasted dat I don't know which way to turn.

" An' whilst she was a-talkin' in drapped Sis Luellen wid a bottle in her hand, an' a box of pills in her reticule.

" 'Sis Mirandy,' says she, 'don't you trust yo'-self to none of dis heah doctor's stuff dat comes

out of de drug sto', for I ain't got no opinion of hit. Nawm, whut you needs is a good home-made remedy dat's concocted out of yarbs, an' things dat is gathered in de right time of de moon, an' biled down wid a little good whiskey.

" 'My sister Hannah was a-doctorin' wid dis sto' physic, an' a-payin' out money to doctors for nigh on to twenty years, an' den she was cured by takin' a bottle of dis heah bitters lak I brung you. To be shore she had whut de doctors call de bugaloosa in dese days, an' dat we used to call de consumption, an' you is got de rheumatiz; but whut I say is dat a medicine dat is good for one thing is good for anudder, an' so I begs you as a friend to throw away de doctor's stuff an' take dis heah whut I brung you.'

"An' I has to promise dat I'll do hit for fear of hurtin' Sis Luellen's feelin's, but befo' I kin git hit down here comes Sis Nancy wid a book as big as de dictionary, an' a passel of tracts to treat me on de Christian Science platform.

" 'Sis Mirandy,' says she, 'dere ain't nothin' de matter wid you. Whut you thinks you is sufferin' is a error of mortal mind.'

" 'Sis Nancy,' spons I, 'hit's my back dat's a hurtin'. I could hold dat faith ef hit was yo'

back, but bein' as how hit's my own back I'm
obleeged to dispute de pint.'

"An' den Sis Nancy drew her book on me an'
began readin' to me ontell I got dat mad I flung
Sis Luellen's bottle of bitters at her haid, and
Ma'y Jane come in an' say as how I'se sort of
flighty an' dat dey better leave me alone.

"But I warn't; but I does hold dat when a
pusson is sick dey's got a right to enjoy bein' sick
in deir own way, an' widout bein' persecuted by
deir friends, an' deir friends' doctors, an' deir
friends' remedies, an' religion.

"Yassum, hit's a awful thing to have a spell
of sickness wid a complication of well meanin'
friends, an' dere's plenty dat ain't got de consti-
tution to survive hit."

III

Revising the Ten Commandments

“ ‘WELL, Brer Jenkins,’ says I to our preacher de odder day when he smelt chicken fixin’s an’ drapped into our house to supper, ‘Ma’y Jane has been a-readin’ me in de paper dat dem big preacher men is gwine to shorten up de Ten Commandments.’

“ ‘Well, Sis Mirandy,’ spons Brer Jenkins, ‘jedgin’ by de way dat folks keeps ’em, dey might cut out all of de Commandments, an’ nobody wouldn’t know de difference.

“ ‘I declar’ Sis Mirandy,’ he goes on, ‘hit’s got to be so now dat yous got to sugar-coat religion to git anybody to swallow hit at all, an’ as for doctrine, you is got to dilute hit down so much to make hit set on de modern stummick ontel hit’s so weak dat hit ain’t got no mo’ taste to hit dan a mush puddin’.’

“ ‘Amen,’ ’claims I, ‘bless Gord for de true words! As for me, give me de good ole hell fire an’ damnation religion, wid de sinners a-hangin’ over de pit by de har of deir hails, an’

de saints lettin' out hallelujah hollers wid ev'y breath.'

" 'Dat's right,' says Brer Jenkins, a-fetchin' a groan, 'dat's de kind of religion dat hets folks up, an', Sis Mirandy, mam, when I was young I used to be a master hand at handin' hit out.

" 'Yessum, ef I do say hit myself, as hadn't oughter,' persues Brer Jenkins, helpin' hisself to anodder chicken leg an' some mo' of de sweet potatoes, 'yessum, I was a 'zorter what made de fur fly, an' de way I pounded de pulpit raised de dust so dat hit mos' hid me from de congregation. Furdemo', in dem days de Bible was thought good enough for de preacher to take his text out of, but nowadays de chu'ch thinks dat you is a back number, an' begins to look around for a new minister, ef you don't preach right straight out of de newspapers.

" 'An', mo'over and lakwise, you is got to confine yo' remarks to picturin' de joys of heaven for dey won't stand for bein' harried up wid no reference to de place whar de worm dieth not an' de fire is not quenched becaze dey has done proved to deir own saterfaction dere ain't no sech a spot.'

" 'Dat's so,' spons I, 'an' I tell you, Brer Jenkins, I certainly did sustain a pussonal loss

when dey took away my faith in hell. Yessir, I sho'ly was bereaved, for I took a heap of comfort in thinking dat a lot of folks what has done dirt to me was headed dat way, an' was gwine to git what was a-comin' to 'em for throwin' asparagus on my character.'

" 'Dat's right, Sis Mirandy,' says Brer Jenkins; 'dey is done took away mos' of de consolations of religion, an' made salvation so sure dat nobody ain't botherin' no mo' about makin' deir callin' an' election safe. Looks lak folks 'pears to think dat dere ain't no class to bein' a angel, an' gwine straight to glory when dey die, ef ev'ybody else is got a harp an' a crown waitin' for 'em dat dey can't lose.'

" 'Well,' says I, 'hit looks lak to me dat dem preachers, I don't care ef dey is bishops an' big bugs lak dat, has got deir nerve wid 'em when dey lays deir hands on de Ten Commandments an' tries to shorten 'em up.'

" 'Sis Mirandy,' says Brer Jenkins, 'don't you blame de men too much, for I reckon dat about de mos' unpopularest document in de world is dem same Ten Commandments. You see de trouble wid 'em is dat dey steps on too many toes. Dey is lak a stick of dynamite, dat a preacher has to handle mighty careful in de pul-

pit, for ef he draps 'em hard dey is liable to bust loose an' blow up de ve'y brer what puts de biggest wad in de contribution box.

"So I spects dat dem preachers thought dat dey had best cut dem commandments over, accordin' to de fashion of de times, for dey sho'ly don't fit comfortable now on a real styly congregation."

"'Brer Jenkins,' I axes, 'how you reckon dem folks what is tinkerin' wid de commandments is gwine to alter 'em?'

"'Cose I don't know, Sis Mirandy,' spons Brer Jenkins, 'caze dey ain't axed my advice, but I spects dey'll sort of lighten up things an' say, "Thou shalt have no God but me, except money an' sassiety," an' "Thou shalt remember the Sabbath Day to play golf an' go to picnics," an' "Parents shall honor deir chillen and obey 'em," an' "Thou shalt not kill unless thou hast got enough money to hire doctors dat will prove you is crazy," an' "Thou shalt not steal unless you takes a million." Furdermo', Sis Mirandy, I guess dey'll sort of soften up dem commandments about sidesteppin' so as not to hurt de feelin's of dem what has swapped husbands and wives wid deir neighbors an' is just got back from Reno.'

" 'Yes, Sis Mirandy,' goes on Brer Jenkins, 'what de Ten Commandments needs to make 'em popular is to make 'em lighter as well as shorter. A lot mo' people would keep 'em ef dey didn't interfere so much wid what dey is doing.'

" 'Maybe so,' I spons, 'but I don't hold wid none of dese heah new fangled, short cut, ball-bearing faiths, dat are guaranteed to save you, whether or no. De ole time religion is good enough for me, an' I'se pinnin' my faith to dat, an' to stumbling' along, keepin' de tightest grip I can to de Ten Commandments de length de Lord handed 'em down.' "

IV

The Troubles of Women

“**N**AWM, dere ain’t no luck in bein’ bawn a woman, no way. You is marked for trouble from de ve’y minnit dat de doctor says to yo’ ma, ‘Hit’s a fine gal, Ma’am,’ an’ you is dest as sho’ to git all dat’s comin’ to you as de sparks is to fly upwards.

“Dere ain’t nothin’, from gwine upstairs totin’ a baby in one hand, an’ a lamp in de odder, an’ holdin’ up yo’ frock wid yo’ teeth, down to tryin’ to vote, an’ gittin’ flung out of de pollin’ place becaze you belongs to de angel sect, dat hit ain’t harder to do becaze you is a woman.

“Now sposin’ a man wants to git married. All he got to do is to up an’ pick out de lackliest lookin’ gal in de neighborhood, an’ hit don’t make no difference how little, an’ runty, an’ bandy legged he is, he can git her, an’ ev’ybody say, ‘whut a lucky gal Samanthy is dat she done catch a husban’ at las’!’

“But when we women wants to git married, all

dat we kin do is to set aroun' on de anxious seat
an' do de best we can to tole in some man unbeknownst to hisself, an' widout rousin' de suspicions of de neighbors. Lawd, hit makes me tired to dis day to think of de wuk, an' de trouble I took to kotch Ike—dat's my old man—an' ef I knowed de ins an' de outs of maternony den lak I does now, an' how many stove lifters, an' rollin' pins I'd have had to a busted makin' married life one gran' sweet song, as de hymn book says—for I'se all for peace, ef I has to fight for hit—why, I specs dat I would have been a ole maid.

"But a woman don't dodge trouble by bein' a ole maid, becaze ef she stays single, an' starts out to make a livin' lak a man does, lo an' behold, all de men raises de cry dat she's done got out of her sacred spear. Now de odder night I was at de pra'r meeting, an' Brer Jinkins suttinly had promulgated a most edifyin' discourse, an' had des hung de sinners over de pit by de har of dere hails ontel you could fa'ly smell 'em frizzlin'.

"Hit sholy was a refreshin' meetin', an' when things kin' of het up I felt a call to 'zort de sinners, but no sooner is I riz up in my seat dan Brer Jinkins called out:

" 'Sis Mirandy, set down! De women must keep silence in de chuch. Dey's de weaker vessel.'

" 'Don't you come no weaker vessel on me,' I spons, for my dander was up. 'Whar would de chuches be ef dere warn't no women in dem? Who would pay de preacher? Whar did you git dat fine coat on yo' back, Brer Jinkins? Don't seem lak I heah nobody complainin' 'bout women talkin' in de chuch when dey talks 'bout passin' 'round de hat. I'se been listenin' mighty close, wid my year to de groun', but when de money dat de Daughters of Zion raises talks nobody don't say, "Heish" to hit. Least of all de preachers.'

" 'Set down, woman,' says Brer Jinkins, 'a woman whut speechifies in public am a scandal an' a disgrace, an' out of her place,' an' bein' as I had said my say, I set down.

" 'Yas, Lawd, hit sholy is funny 'bout woman's sacred spear. As near as I kin figger hit out, you is in hit as long as you raises de money, but when you wants to have a hand in de spendin' of hit you dest busts right out of your spear den an' dar. I mind one day when I was comin' home from de laddies whut I washes for, wid a bundle of clothes 'bout de size of a trunk, dat I meets

up wid Ike, an' we stops an' passes de time of day.

" 'Fo' de Lawd, Mirandy,' said he, 'but you is a fine, stroppin' woman to tote a load lak dat.'

"Wid dat he perambulated on his way widout stoppin' to lend me a hand in gittin' de clothes home. Bimeby he come along agin when I was fetchin' de water to wash wid, but he didn't say nothin' 'bout packin' in a few buckets to help me, but dat evenin' after I done took de clothes home an' got de money for de wash, I meets him agin, an' he says:

" 'Mirandy, you look kinder tired an' tuckered out. You better let me tote yo' pocketbook for you.'

"But I spons dat if I'se got de strength to do de work, I sho can brace up enough to pack de money hit brings in, an' den Ike looks mighty sorrowful an' says as how he's afeared I'se a-gittin' out of my spear, an' dat he s'pects de next thing I will want is to vote. An' I answers dat I does, an' dat if dere is anything in votin' for men, dat women needs it worst dan dey does, an' den he fetches a groan an' says dat de country shorely will go to de dogs whenever women gits out of dere sacred spear.

"Den I up an' asks him what is women's sacred



"Mirandy, you better let me tote yo' pocketbook
for you."

spear, an' he don't know no more dan a rabbit. But I does. I done took notice dat women's sacred spear is doin' de jobs dat ain't got no pay to 'em, an' dat no man ain't hankerin' after. 'S long's a woman stays at home an' patches her husband's britches, an' nusses de babies, an' does de cookin' an' de scrubbin', an' takes in a little washin' on de side to help out wid de rent money an' keep de pot boilin', ev'ry man thinks she is des where she ought to be, 'caze he ain't a-honin' after dem jobs. But when she gits where she gits real money, an' somethin' easy to do, den a howl goes up dat she's done jumped over dé bars, an' got out of her sacred spear, an' dat's along of de trouble of bein' a woman.

"Co'se most of de trouble dat married women has is becaze after you gits married you has got to keep yo' weather-eye peeled to keep yo' husband from segasuatin' off wid odder women, but I settled dat question right off of de bat. When me an Ike got spliced he suttinly was a pussonable man, wid a figger dat was as slim an' straight as a telefoam-post, an' I ain't a-blamin' de gals for cuttin' dere eyes at him.

"Now, how you rec'on I stopped all of dat foolishness? You rec'on I des set down to weep an' lament 'bout him runnin' aroun' nights?

Naw'm. I des knocked dat fine figger of his into de middle of next week, an' turned hit into what looked lak a beer-barrel on skids. Yessum, I shorely did take temptation out of dat nigger's way. I stuffed him so full he couldn't move. After a man has been up ag'inst a chicken-dinner wid fixin's, he ain't got no call to hunt up fun dat is outside de home limits. All he wants to do is to shuffle over to a chair in de chimney-corner an' smoke his pipe. Naw'm, dere ain't no way of keepin' a man at home of a evenin' lak fillin' him so full dat he can't move. Besides, dere ain't nothin' dat stops flirtatiousness lak fat. You don't see no woman lookin' back over her shoulder at a gentleman wid a bay window.

"Den I is never been sparin' of usin' soft soap wid Ike. A man's got to have hit, an' if his wife don't hand hit to him wid a shovel, some odder woman will wid a spoon: Dat's de way I looks at hit, an' as long as I wants Ike to bring me home his pay envelope of a Saturday night I'se got to run de axle grease factory. When Ma'y Jane Jones tells Ike dat he sho' has got a proud walk, I spons dat he suttinly does perambulate lak a prince. When Elviry Smith fetches him a compliment 'bout lookin' lak a dude, I low dat hit's de figger of de man, an' dat he could make any

kin' of hand me downs look lak dey just walked out of de tailor shop.

"Co'se, some folks holds dat hit's de women's place to keep dere husbands fascinated by bein' beautiful, dough ugly, an' dat de way to do dat is to keep demselves lookin' lak a livin' skeleton, an' I reckon dat at de present time dere ain' no odder trouble dat women has got dat is equal to de affliction of gittin' rid of deir fat. As for me, I don't hold wid none of dat foolishness, caze I done took notice dat, in de fúst place, men ain't sot on scrawny women.

"Dey's dest natcherally drawed to a woman whut looks lak she knows how to put a heavy han' on de seasonin' in cookin', an' dat is too hefty to move 'roun spry enough to keep up wid 'em. Ef you will notice you will see dat most of de ole maids belongs to de raizor back class. Dere ain't nothin' 'bout one of dese heah po', stringy, starved lookin' women dat makes a man think 'bout de comforts of home. As for me, I ain't botherin' myself 'bout gittin' fat, an' I ain't a pinchin' on whut I eats, caze ef I'se got to choose betwixt po'k chops, an' Ike, I'se gwine to take de po'k chops. Dere's mo' substance to 'em dan dere is to de love dat can't stand anodder inch in yo' waist measure.

"An' den dere's de trouble dat women has 'bout gittin' advised. Dere ain't nothin' in dis world dat a woman can do, or leave undone, dat dere ain't somebody handin' out advice 'bout hit to her. Most of de sermons in de chuches is addressed to de sisteren instid of de brethren, dough Gawd knows de brethren needs 'em worse, an' whenever a man has got a spâre minnit, he ups an' tells women whut a awful crime dey's committin' by dis heah raced susancide.

"Dat's sholy does rile me, for ef dere is one place whar a man should sing small, an' talk low, hit's in de neighborhood of de cradle. I'se a reasonable woman, an' I'se willing to listen to dem whut's been through de mill, an' to take dere advice, an' ef you'll fetch along a man whut has had a baby—or maybe twinses—I'll set at his feet an' listen to de words of wisdom dat draps from his lips, des as humble as de next one.

"But when men whut ain't never had no personal experience in de baby line, an' dat ain't never had to git up of a cold night an' walk de colic, an' dat thinks dat you washes a baby lak you does a setter pup, comes along an' tells women 'bout how dey ought to populate de earth, an' increase de number of dem whut finds hit hard enough to make a livin' as hit is, hit sholy do

make me tired. Becaze hit does look to me dat ef dere is one subject dat women has a right to an opinion on, hit is de baby question. Let dem dat has 'em, number 'em.

"An' look at de difference in de way dat hit is when a man's sick, an' a woman's sick. When Ike comes home an' finds me gwine 'round de house wid my jaw tied up for de neuralgy, or my arm in a sling for de rheumatics, he takes a mighty ca'm view of hit, an' tells me to buck up an' bear hit, an' dat de best way to git rid of sickness, is to wuk hit off, but my lan', when he's sick, de tale am different. I never knows how much sufferin' dere is in dis world, nor how big a fuss anybody can make 'bout hit, ontel Ike gits under de weather, so de odder day when he come home lookin' kin' of peekd an' trimbly, an' wid de shivers playin' up an' down his backbone, I knows dat my wuk was cut out for me.

"As soon's he got in de door he flung hisself down in de chair, an' grabbed his head in his hands, an' let out one of dose day-of-judgment groans. 'Mirandy,' says he, 'I ain't long for dis world. I'se done got my death-warrant.'

"'Huh!' spons I. 'You ain't got nothin' but a bad cold. I'll make you some hot pepper tea, an' you'll be all right in de mornin'.'

"But wid dat he let out anodder groan. 'Heish, woman,' he says. 'Hit's all right for you to dose yo'self an' de chillern on yarb teas, but I don't want you projeckin' wid me, 'caze *my* life is vallyable.'

"Well, after I'd got him in bed, fust he was too hot, an' den he was too cold, an' den he thought de kiver was too light, an' den hit was too heavy, an' I kep' a swappin' things till you'd 'a' thought hit was a tradin' match betwixt de blankets an' de quilts, an' fust an' last I bet I'se made a acre of mustard plasters an' heated four million gallons of water for foot-baths. Den I axed him if dere was anything else I could do for him, an' he spons no, dere is mighty little to do for a dying man, but he knowed after he was gone hit would be a comfort to me dat I'd done what I could, so maybe I'd better cook him some fried chicken an' pork-chops an' a mess of greens, for he thought he would try to eat a little to keep up his strength.

"An' all de time Ike was a-moanin' an' groanin' an' prognosticatin' dat he was gwine to die, an' den he called me to him an' took my hand, an' said dat he's afraid dat he ain't been as good a husband to me as he mout 'a' been, dat he's given me a lot of back talk dat he's sorry for now, an'



King He

"An' den he ax me to forgive him."

dat he'd feel a heap more easier in his mind, now dat he's done wid dis world, if he'd paid de rent instid of buyin' Ma'y Jane Jones a bonnet an' a segasuatin' round wid her, an' den he ax me to forgive him, an' I spons dat I will—if he dies, but dat if he don't we'll see 'bout dat.

"Co'se dere's lots of agrivations an' troubles in bein' a woman, but I ain't one of dem women what is always tearin' out dere har becaze dey ain't men. Dat I ain't. Petticoats may not be as handy an' convenient for gittin' 'bout him in as britches, but, my land, dey's a lot mo' protection.

"Dere ain't nothin' dat woman does, or don't do, dat ain't excused along of her bein' a woman. . Des her sect is sort of a standin' apology for her failures, an' a ruffled petticoat wid lace on de aidges is worth more dan an alibi in a murder trial. Dere ain't no use tryin' to convict a good-lookin' woman what's done killed somebody, becaze nobody believes dat she did hit in de fust place, an' in de second place dey is convinced dat de person ought to've been killed anyhow, an' in de last place dey think dat a woman ought not to be punished noway, no matter what she does.

"An' den when you wants to give anybody

back talk, hit shorely does give you de whiphand to be a woman, lessen you wants to sass yo' husband. If hit is some odder man dat is obliged to remember dat a gentleman can't lift his hand ag'inst a lady dat ain't his own wife, you's got him on de run. When dere's any occasion in our house to tell de butcher an' de gas-man dat dey is thieves an' liars an' assassins, I'se de one dat always does hit, becaze if Ike was to specify himself dat way to 'em we'd be mighty liable to need to call in de ambulance. I certainly is argifayed wid men dat had de expression of 'damn' all over 'em, yet all dey did was to grit dere teeth, an' smirk, an' smile at me.

"Yessum, hit's a great thing to be a woman. Hit's 'bout de best excuse, goin' an' comin', dat anybody has ever invented yet, an' as for me, when I want protection I'd rather shelter myself behind a real styly well-hung silk frock dan behind a pile of four-inch steel armor. Dat's where we git good an' even for all de trouble of bein' a woman. You hear me? Yessum."

V

Women's Clubs

“**L**AS’ night,” remarked Mirandy, “Brer Jenkins sho’ly did give us a soul-sarchin’ sermon on de subject of women’s clubs, whut he ’lowed was at de bottom of all de wickedness in de world.

“He say as how hit was women’s clubs dat drove men to drink, an’ Brer Ishom, whut ain’t nothin’ but a beer keg, holler out ‘Amen!’ An’ dat hit was women’s clubs dat sont husbands off to de crap games, an’ Brer Sim, whut draps his pay envelope at de corner grocery befo’ he kin git home of a Saturday night, fetch a groan an’ say, ‘Bless Gord fer de true word.’ An’ dat hit was women’s clubs dat was responsible for all de divorches, an’ Brer Reuben, whut keeps Sis Sally’s eyes blacked up all de time along of beatin’ her when things don’t suit him, spons, ‘Yes, Lawd!’ An’ dat women’s clubs is de cause of all de po’, little neglected chillen, and Brer Silas, whose wife is sickly an’ got fo’teen dozen

chillens an' twins to boot, called out, 'Praise de Lamb, dat's so!'

"Howsomever, Ike kept moughty still, which may have been becaze my eye was upon him, an' agin, mought have been becaze he had convictions odderwise; but I took notice dat he didn't raise his voice in bearin' witness, even when Brer Jenkins wind up by sayin' dat a woman's place was in de home, an' dat when she went out of hit she knocked de props out from under religion an' society, dough dat sentiment, I is took notice, is jest as shore of a round of applause from men as hit is for de clown to kick somebody acrost de ring at de circus.

"After de sermon Brer Jenkins come along an' shake hands an' past de time of day wid me an' Sis Marthy, an' we bof' sho'ly did give him a warm welcome.

"'Brer Jenkins,' says I, 'dat suttinly was a grand sermon, an', as far as dis ole woman is concerned, hit is gwine to bear fruit right away.'

"'I'm pleased to hear dat, Sis Mirandy,' spons Brer Jenkins, 'an' to know dat I sowed de seed on de fertile ground.'

"'Dat's right,' says I. 'Ef you'll des drap around at de chu'ch to-morrow arternoon 'bout

"I'm gwine to disband de Daughters of Zion."

A. G. M.



three o'clock you kin gladden yo' eyes by seein' me an' all de balance of de Daughters of Zion a-settin' under de shade of de turnip tree dat has growed up in a single night from de seeds you drapped.'

"How's dat, Sis Mirandy?" axes Brer Jenkins, wid a sort of a trimble in his voice.

"Well," spon's I, "I'm gwine to disband de Daughters of Zion, becaze, if women's clubs is de occasion of all dem backslidin's on de part of men dat you say dat dey is, an' is a-strewin' de lan' wid busted homes, an' chillen dat ain't got no buttons on deir clothes, I ain't gwine to have no part nor lot in 'em. Nawsir, I ain't a-gwine to countenance, let 'lone run, no aggregation of female snakes dat's drivin' noble an' innercent men to drink an' gamble to forgit deir sorrer, an' a-raisin' up chillen for de chain gang, an' darfore de sooner dat de Daughters of Zion is put out of business de better."

"But, Sis Mirandy," says Brer Jenkins, "de Daughters of Zion is a religious organization."

"I can't help hit, Brer Jenkins, hit's a woman's club all de same, an' hit takes a woman away from home des as long to attend de sewin' society an' git up a chu'ch fair as hit does to go to de literary society an' hear a woman wid a

knobby forehead an' a dress dat hikes up in de front prognosticate 'bout Brownin'.'

" 'But, Sis Mirandy,' argifys Brer Jenkins, 'whar would we git de money to pay de preacher's salary ef hit warn't for de Daughters of Zion?'

" 'Hit's tainted money, Brer Jenkins,' 'spon's I, 'an' you are better off widout hit.'

" 'An' de elders always looks to de Daughters of Zion to pay off de chu'ch debt at de eend of de year, an' buy de new cyarpet, an' put in fancy glass windows lak dem vainglorious Presbyterians has around de corner.'

" 'Let 'em look no mo',' spons I, 'for de Daughters of Zion is pious women, an' ef we's been a-committin' onbeknownst all dem sins dat you promulgates we is, den we'se gwine to quit right here an' now, for dere ain't none of us made our callin' an' election dat sho' dat we feels lak we kin take any resk on hit by belongin' to one of dem wicked women's clubs.'

" But Brer Jenkins didn't have no notion of havin' de mainstay of de contribution box tucken away from him, an' he explained dat we had misunderstood him, an' dat hit was all right for women to belong to clubs, to raise money for men to spend, but dat de wrong come in when

women banded deirselves togedder, in societies for deir own fun, an' improvement.

"Which looked to me lak a moughty jubous proposition, an' a-whippin' de devil aroun' de stump.

"In dis view," goes on Brer Jenkins, "I has de endorsement of all de men dat is husbands."

"Dat you don't," spon's Brer Thomas, "for ef dere ever was a mussiful dispensation of Providence for de savin' of de life and de peace of po', downtrodden man, hit is de woman's club, an' ef I knowed who founded de fust one, I'd travel a thousand miles to place a bouquet on her grave."

"Why so?" inquires Brer Jenkins.

"Becaze," spon's Brer Thomas, "de way a woman is built, she ain't happy, unless she is reformin' somethin'. Hit's a constitutional affliction wid her, an' she can't help hit. In de days befo' dere was any women's clubs, she used to wuk off her reforms on her husband. Now she takes hit out on reformin' de public. De club is a kind of safety valve, whar she blows off her steam, an' nobody ain't hurt nor interfered wid.

"Now, I ain't whut you'd call a drinkin' man, but I feels hit best to do lak St. Paul, an' take a little for de stomach's sake, whilst my Mariar is full of temperance views, dat I would have to

stand for ef hit warn't dat, I kin take de opportunity whilst she is off at de Prohibition Club a-passin' redhot resolutions against de christenin' of a ship wid wine, to step around to de corner grocery and git all de load I kin tote home. Nuther is I flirtatious, but many's de pleasant evenin' I passes wid a good-lookin' gal, I knows whilst Mariar is a-memoralin' Congress to suppress polygamy amongst de Sulus. Furdermo', havin' somethin' to think of besides me an' my shortcomin's, Mariar don't feel called on to haul me up to de bar of justice as often as she sho'ly would ef I was de only thing dat she had to reform. Nor does she hold down on de latchkey when she wants one herself.

" 'Maybe I ain't got de right spirit, but, pus-
sonally speakin', I'd ruther be married to a
woman who was reformin' things outside of de
house dan in hit. Let de President an' de Legis-
lature an' Congress stand for de pra'rs, an' de pe-
titions, an' de protests. Dey is paid for hit. I
ain't, an' dat's de reason dat I always encourages
Mariar to jine all de hen clubs, dat she wants
to.'

" 'Amen!' says Ike."

VI

Why Men Don't Marry

"**I** HEARS a heap of talk," observed Mirandy,
"bout de reason dat bachelors don't marry
dese days, an' it sho'ly does look lak dat men
is got so skittish dat dey shies off from de altar
wuss'n a country horse at one of dese here mobile
wagons.

"It cert'ly does take a woman whut's up an'
doin' to ketch a husband now, an' when a gal
does get her halter aroun' a man's neck she struts
about wid a proud air, an' a discontemptuous
look, lak she was a leadin' de circus elephant to
water.

"Yessum, I'se done seed a spry an' lakely
lookin' young woman whut's done got tied up
wid a poor, runty, measly, little bandy leg hus-
band, an' she looked dat proud dat you'd a
thought dat she done drawed a glory ticket, 'stid
of gitting a life job at takin' in washin' to keep
meat in de pot for two, 'stead of one, an' gittin'
up in de night to open de do' for a man whut's

done been an' drapped his week's wages in a craps game.

"Yessum, it sho' is gittin' mighty hard to tole a man into matermony. Even de widowers is sorter hangin' on to dair freedom when dey gets foot loose, an' ev'ybody knows hit's lots easier to ketch a widower dan it is a bachelor, kase a widower has sorter had his spirit broken, an' is bridle wise, an' some says dere's one reason for dis, an' some says there's anudder.

"Some folk argufy dat de reason dat men don't marry is becaze de girls ain't familius enuf wid de cook stove, an' dey think more about prancin' aroun' in good clothes dan dey does 'bout how to sling de pots an' de pans. But, my land! dat ain't no reason at all. Dyspepsy ain' never skered no man off from gittin' married yet. If a man is in love wid a gal he thinks dat he ain't never gwine to be hungry no mo', an' he ain't prognosticatin' whut sort of a hand she's got wid a po'k chop. He's thinkin' dat hes gwine to hold her lily white hand in his de balance of his life.

"Odder folks says dat de reason bachelors don't marry is because dey is selfish, an' wants to spend der money on demselves. Huh! I done traveled a long ways through dis vale of

sorrers, an' I done took notice dat, fust or last, some woman gits a man's money. Dat's de way de good Lawd fixed it. Man was made to wuk for woman, an' I ain't never seen any yet dat dodged hit. If it ain't one woman dat gits his pay envelope on Saturday night, it's anudder, an' I 'low hit's a lot cheaper to buy callico dresses for a wife dan hit is to pay for silk frocks and jay bird heel shoes for a sweetheart. Yassum, a wife sho' is a economy to a man.

"Nawm, dem aint de reasons dat men don't marry. De reasons is wid de gals. De gals is too willin'. Dey runs after de man, an' a woman is lak a hen. She aint built for runnin', an' she can't ketch a husband by persooin' him. He always outruns her.

"Gals used to play kinder offish, an' act lak a man would have to beg an' persuade 'em on his knees befo' dey would condescend to marry him, an' de Pas an' de Mas would hang aroun' lak day was tryin' to keep him from stealin' deir treasure from 'em, an' hit made a man feel lak he had to do somethin' an' do it quick, if he didn't want to let de prize get away from him. So he up and popped de question, an' was married befo' you could say 'scat.'

"But now de gals is on de anxious seat, an'

dey don't make no bones of who knows it. Dey hangs aroun' whar a man wuks, an' calls him up by de telefoam if he fergits to come to see 'em, an' becaze he thinks he can marry a gal any old day he keeps puttin' hit off an' puttin' hit off, an' he don't marry her at all.

"An' right dar, when she make herself too easy to get, is whar a gal draps her rabbit foot. De way to conjure a man is by making yourself sca'ce, not by lettin' him git too much of you. A man has got to have somethin' to make him jump into matermony lak when the auctioneer says, 'Going, going, gone!'

"Now, when I fust sot my eyes on Ike—an' he cert'n'ly was a pussonable man in dem days—dere wuz a lot of women settin' roun' him so flabbergasted dat dey'd ketch deir breath ev'y time dat he look at 'em, an' Ike he des fling 'em a word now an' den, lak you would fling a bone to a dog, an' den dey would go home an' scuffle aroun' to see which one could make him de biggest cake, an' de finest pie, an' Ike he ain't a layin' awake at night a projekkin' in his mind which one of dem womens dat he gwine to wuk and suppo't de balance of his life. Kaze he knows all of 'em is des waitin' to be axed.

"But you better believe I didn't jine dat hal-

lelujah chorus dat was saying, 'Amen' ev'y time he open his mouth. Nawm, I done cut my wisdom teeth, an' knows better dan dat. I des pass him by wid a discomtemptous look, an' dat night I went over and borrowed Marse John Jones' bulldog, an' de fus' time dat Ike come to see me I got Pap to sic de bulldog on him.

"Yassum, comin' a-courtin' me sho was a risky job, kaze dat was a bad bulldog, an' befo' I promised Ike to sashay up de church aisle wid him he done lost de seat of fo' pair o' breches an' had his coat tails chawed into fringe, an' de more I holt out, an' had to be persuaded to marry him, an' de oftener de dog chased him over de fence, de mo' Ike was determined to come, an' de wus he wanted to marry me.

"Yassum, I sho' is got a kind feelin' for bulldogs.

"An' to dis day I ain't never let Ike find out dat I thinks dat he's a mighty lakely lookin' man, an' dat when he's aroun' dat ol' man Solomon aint far off. Kaze it's lak dis: If you wants to tell a man whut you think he won't listen to you. But if you go off by yourself he'll break his neck to find out if you'se thinkin' 'bout him. I ain't never seen no woman catch a man yet by runnin' after him but if she will turn aroun' an'

run away from him, he'll break his neck to overtake her.

"You hear me?"

VII

Different Tongues

“DE odder night Ma'y Jane whut is got de higher eddication, an' takes mo' interest in whut folks is doin' in furrin' parts dan whut dey's doin' right next do' to her, was a readin' to me an' her paw a piece in de paper whut tells 'bout some people down in Africky, whar de husband speaks one langwidge, an' de wife speaks anodder langwidge.

“‘Whut a strange place, an' whut a remarkable race,’ says Ma'y Jane, a gazin’ pensive lak at de ceiling, ‘oh, how I should like to travel, an' go an' see dem curis customs.’

“‘Humph,’ sclaims I wid a meanin’ glance at Ike, ‘I don’t know dat you’se got to pay out yo’ money travellin’ hither an’ yan to see a man dat talks wid one tongue to his wife, an’ anodder tongue to odder ladies, specially ef his wife is fat, and dem ladies is young, and slim, an’ is got straight front figgers.

“‘Naw, daughter,’ I goes on, warmin’ up to de

subject, ‘you don’t have to leave yo’ own country, nor yo’ own state, nor yo’ own town, nor yo’ own street, nor yo’ own house to find men whut don’t understand whut deir wives says to ’em—leastways ef dey do understand, dey don’t act on hit. ‘Yas, daughter,’ says I, ‘you take my word for hit dat whedder you travels far or near, de most curis nation of people dat you is ever gwine to set yo’ eyeballs on is husbands, an’ hit’s my opinion dat ef most of ’em was whar dey belong dey would be out in de Zoo wid de odder wild animals dat can’t be tamed, nor domesticated, instid of roamin’ around amongst po’, helpless, weak women seeking whom dey may devour, lak one of dese heah ravellin’ lions whut de Good Book tells ’bout.’

“ ‘De trouble wid most of de men dat I meets up wid,’ says Ma’y Jane, ‘is dat dey ain’t lions, but sheep dat take to deir heels an’ runs when dey sees a skirt bearin’ down deir way. Oh,’ she goes on wid a wishful look in her eyes, ‘but I sho’ly would lak to be chased down by one bold, woman-eating man!’

“ ‘Daughter,’ ’spons I, ‘you take hit from me dat men is got mighty curis peculiarities, an’ de curisiest of ’em is dat no matter how tame dey is before marriage, dey is wild enough afterwards.’

" 'Well,' says Ma'y Jane, 'I reckon dat's so, an' dat de reason dat so many husbands sets up lak images at home, wid no more talk in 'em dan a stuffed bear, is becaze dey don't speak de same langwidge dat deir wives does, an' dey ain't got no way of swappin' ideas.'

" 'Huh,' snorts Ike, 'when a man don't shoot off his mouth at home hit's becaze he's tryin' to keep out of a fight, an' to pour oil on de trouble' waters lak dish heah Mr. Carnegie. But whut's dat you say, daughter, 'bout de paper tellin' about a place whar de wives an' de husbands don't speak de same tongue?

" 'You take it from me dat dat ain't so, an' dat dere ain't no sich a place dis side of heaven, becaze ef dere was, de railroads would be runnin' 'scursions to hit, an' ev'y married man would light out for hit as soon as he could scrape toggeder de price of a ticket—an' dey would all be one way tickets, too. Dere wouldn't be no return coupons.

" 'Yassum, ef dere's any sich a land a flowin' wid milk and honey, an' peace and quiet, lead me to it! And leave me dere!

" 'Des think of how soul saterfyin' hit would be to a man when he picked up his hat of a evenin', right after supper, an' started for de

crap game at de corner saloon, to be able to wave his hand at his wife an' say:

“ ‘ ‘ I hears you makin’ a kind of jabberin’ noise, but I don’t know whut it means. Maybe you are wishin’ me luck, an’ spressifyin’ your hope dat I’ll pass a pleasant evenin’ wid a bunch of congenial friends aroun’ a beer table.

“ ‘ ‘ Or maybe you is givin’ me yo’ opinion of a man whut spends his time away from home, an’ throws away his money gamblin’ when his chillun needs shoes, an’ whut come home at two o’clock in de mawnin’ dat tanked up wid red eye dat he can’t find de keyhole. Likely you is sayin’ one, or de odder, of dese tings, but as I don’t understand yo’ langwidge hit don’t make no difference to me, an’ I’ll jest sashay along, an’ you can’t stop me, becaze I ain’t on to your lingo.”

“ ‘ Yassum, an’ jest t’ink whut a savin’ hit is to a man’s pocket not to be able to make out whut she’s after when his wife’s holdin’ him up for his pay envelope. Maybe in dat land of de blessed, a man’s wife axes him for a new dress, an’ a new hat, an’ de money to buy de chillun flower bunnets and forty leben odder things, an’ all dat he has to do is jest to shake his head, in-



"But I don't know whut it means."

stid of gwine down into his jeens and pullin' up de cash.

“ ‘ “My dear turtle dove,” he says, “I sees you a givin’ me de high sign, an’ de grip, but I don’t know yo’ pass word, or whut you want. Howsomever, seein’ dat you has got de luck to be married to me, I takes hit dat you is sayin’ dat you can make over your ole dress, and fix over your last winter’s hat so dat de sisters in de church won’t know it, an’ for me to take whatever spare cash I has got on hand an’ go an’ buy me a red weskit, an’ a fur-lined overcoat.”

“ ‘ And jest think how restful matermony must be in dat country where dere ain’t no use in a wife bottlin’ up her thoughts about her husband to tell him at night, becaze he don’t understand one word she says. Co’se women is women, wherever dey is, an’ life wouldn’t be worth livin’ to ’em unless dey could tell dere husbands how dey got fooled when dey got married, an’ how much better off dey wuz when dey lived wid deir Mas and Pas, an’ how dey could have married some man about seven feet high an’ dat made a million dollars a day, instid of de po’, weak, runty shrimp dat don’t draw down but twelve dollars a week, dat dey did tie up wid.

" 'Yassum, no doubt ev'y woman in de world says dat, no matter whut langwidge she speaks; caze dat's de common langwidge of all wives, but hit sutinly would be soothin' to a man's vanity ef he warn't on to de meanin' of de words she said hit in.

" 'Yassum, hit sholy would make for domestic peace for a man not to be able to make out jest whut his wife's unbiased opinion of him was, an' whilst she was a prognosticatin' about his faults and his weaknesses for him to be able to say, as he dropped off to sleep:

" ' "Sing on, sweet bird, I hears you a wabblin' somethin', but wedder you is throwin' boquets at me or jabbin' pitchforks into me, I don't know, so keep on if hit amuses you, for hit don't hurt me."

" 'Yassum,' says Ike a heavin' a sigh, 'dat land where de husbands speak one langwidge an' de wives anodder is de place for married folks, an' I'se gwine to hike out for hit.'

" 'Well, hit don't make no hit wid me,' says I, 'for de onliest weapon dat a woman has got is her tongue, an' ef you makes hit so dat a husband ain't afraid of dat, she ain't got no way to perteect herself, an' whar is she?'

" 'Des to think,' spons Ike in a kind of dreamy

tone, 'dat dere's a country where de scoldin' of wives don't mean nothin' more to a man dan de buzzin' of mosquitoes! I wonder whut it cost to get there.' ”

VIII

A Good Beginning

“**C**ALLINE SIMPKINS, whut is gwine to marry Bill Hawkins nex’ month, took me to one side de odder day, an’ axed me a mighty funny question,” observed Mirandy, with a complacent smile.

“ ‘Sis Mirandy,’ says she, ‘I’se ’bout to enter de holy estate of wedlock, which de story books prognosticates to be a picnic, but which, so far as I kin see at home, wid my Ma an’ my Pa a-fightin’ to rule de roost, is mo’ lak a battle ground. Now, I done cas’ my eye around ’mongst de folks I know, an’ I takes notice dat you is de freest woman, an’ has got de politest husband, an’ mo’ clothes of any in my ’quaintance, an’ dat whilst Brer Ike aint to say hen-pecked, he walks mighty humble an’ sings mighty low when you is around, an’ as one sufferin’ fellow-woman to anodder, I axes you how does you do hit?’

“ ‘Shoo,’ I spon’s, ‘hit ain’t no job to manage a husband ef you knows how.’

" 'Maybe not,' says she, 'but from de mess dat mos' women makes of hit, I should jedge dat dere is a lot of howsomeverness 'bout hit.'

" 'Calline,' says I, 'I ain't one of dese heah women whut's always a-handin' out advice free gratis for nothin', an' pokin' hit down people's throats ef dey wont take hit no odder way, but bein' as how de Good Book commands us to speak de word in season, an' as how any woman dat is gittin' her weddin' clothes ready sho'ly am in need of a little counsel 'bout de tribulations she's gwine into, I sorter feels hit my duty to give you a few p'ints.

" 'An' dey is dis: Get off on de right foot. Dat's de whole of de law an' de gospil, as Brer Jenkins says. Ev'ything depends on de start you make when you is fust married. Ef you takes yo' seat on de top of de ladder, dar you'll set, an' yo' husband will stand down at de bottom an' look up an' admire you.

" 'But ef you takes a seat down at de foot of de ladder, a-thinkin' dat he'll boost you up, or dat maybe after awhile you'll climb up yo'self, de ve'y fust time dat you tries to shin up he'll grab you by de petticoats an' pull you back.

" 'For a man don't think no mo' of a woman dan she thinks of herself. An' he believes 'bout

her what she tells him herself, 'specially after dey is married, 'caze after a man's married to a woman he's ready to swallow anything dat she says dat don't call for no argyment, an' dat is kinder ca'm an' peaceable lak.

" 'What makes Ike think dat I is de mos' economical woman in de world? Becaze I'se always a-showin' him de bargains I buys, whilst de things dat I gits tucked in on I shoves under de bed an' keeps mum 'bout.

" 'What makes Ike think dat his guardeen angel must a-been a wukkin' overtime when he married me? Becaze I'se always a-tellin' him whut a good wife I is, an' how I saved him from marryin' Sally Smithers, whut has got twins, or Henrietta Jenkins, whut is de wust cook in town, or Susanna Jones, whut is dat shiftless dat she don't clean up her house from year's eend to year's eend.

" 'Yassum, a woman suttinly does write her own price tag for her husband, an' hit shorely do rile me to see dem gumps of wives dat is always a-beggin' an' a-prayin' deir husbands to overlook somethin' dat dey did, dat de man never would have found out ef dey hadn't told. Dat's de good of bein' married to a man, instid of bein' engaged to him—yo' husband don't look close enough at you to see whut you does do.

" 'Yassum, dere ain't nothin' lak gittin' off on de right foot when you is married. In ev'y fambly dere's one dat is hit, an' de odder one dat ain't. Dere's one dat's got ways, an' dere's de odder one dat's got to put up wid dem ways. Dere's one dat's got to have de lean piece of de pork chops, an' de odder dat's got to eat de fat dat's lef' on de dish. Dere's one dat's got to have de fine clothes an' set in de front pew, whilst de odder kinder sets away back under de gallery, whar folks can't see how many times deir clothes has been cleaned, an' how many patches dey is got on 'em.

" 'An' hit's de one dat gits de runnin' start when dey is married dat leads de procession all de way through. Whut happens in dem famblies whar de wife 'nounces from de start dat she never has done no hard wuk, an' don't never expect to, an' dat she's got to have a silk frock, an' dat she is blessed wid nerves dat has got to be took care of? Don't de husband git up in de mawnin', an' cook de breakfast, an' den hustle out to make de money, an' den walk lak he was walkin' on eggs round home so as not to disturb her? Dat he does.

" 'An' whut happens when a women marries one of dese heah uppity, consequential, big talkin' men dat has always got to be wearin' a

silk hat, an' a tail coat, an' a s'ciety badge in his buttonhole, an' dat's forever a-marchin' in de procession, an' a-totin' de corpses out at de funeral, but dat is too fibble to follow de plow, or sling de hammer in de carpenter shop? Don't his wife take in washin' to support de fambly, an' shoo de chillen out of de back do' so dey won't make any noise an' spile deir Pa's nap in de daytime? Dat she does.

"An' dat's de reason, when I turned dem facts over in my mind, dat de mawnin' after I was married I poured myself out de first cup of coffee, an' took de brownest biscuit an' de breast of de chicken. An' Ike, he's been passin' 'em to me ever since. I ain't greedy, an' I'd lak to give 'em to Ike once in a while, but I dassent do hit, for de only way a woman kin git anythin' is for her to make her husband believe dat she's 'bleedged to have hit. Ef he once finds out dat she kin do widout hit, she's a goner.

"An' hit's de same way 'bout dem little fracases dat will crop up in de fambly circle. Cose dere ain't no woman dat don't make mistakes; but, thank Gord, men do, too, an' a smart woman always lights into her husband for some-
thin' he's done befo' he gets a chanst to get after her. Now, when I'se been downtown an' I'se

spent de money dat I oughter paid de butcher wid for a Spring bonnet, I sails into Ike 'bout de way he segasuated around Ma' Jane Jones at de chu'ch sociable, an' I gits so much madder dan he is, an' talks so much faster, dat he forgits de remarks he was gwine to make to me 'bout dat butcher bill.

" 'Yassum, dat's so; des give me fust word, an' I don't care who has de las'—ef dere is any las' when I gits through.

" 'Yassum, hit's all in gittin' a good start, an' gittin' off on de right foot when you're married. De reason dat dere is so many po', downtrodden, skimped, neglected wives is becaze when a girl is fust married she's so tickled at havin' a husband, an' so grateful to de man dat kept her from bein' a ole maid, dat she takes a back seat. Den by de time dat she finds out dat she ain't got so much to be thankful for, after all, hit's too late. Her husband is done got settled in de king cheer, an' he's so comfortable she can't git him out.

" 'Nawm. Hit's all in de start, an' any woman dat don't keep her husband so busy apologizing for his shortcomings dat he ain't got time to notice hers don't deserve to have one. Dat's all.' "

IX

Friendship

“EV’Y now an’ den,” observed Mirandy, with a perplexed look on her old face, “ev’y now an’ den Brer Jenkins axes de prars of de congregation for some po’, friendless critter, an’ we all fetches a kind of Amen sigh an’ sloshes over wid pity for ’em.

“Yit when I gits home, an’ begins to cas’ round in my mind for de ’casion of de sympathy, I wonders ef dem what ain’t afflicted wid no friends ain’t got de bulge on de balance of us.

“An’ mo’ specially is I mixed up in my mind ’bout whedder hit’s a blessin’ or a calamity to have friends ef I is walked home wid Sis Hannah, what is my bosom companion, so to speak, what has knowed me ever sence we was chillen toggedder, and darefore when she jabs a hatpin in me, knows des whar hit will hurt most.

“Yassum, dem what ain’t got no friends sho’ly do miss a lot, comin’ an’ goin’. Maybe dey don’t hear many words of affection, but, my

Lawd, dey passes up a lot of plain talk 'bout deir faults an' deir weakness dat folks wid a lot of conscientious friends has to listen to.

"Caze a friend is wuss dan a husband or a wife in pintin' out to you des de places whar you falls down. I goes a little slow in tellin' Ike des what I thinks of him becaze I'se got to live wid him an' git de mos' of his pay envelope out of him on Sat'dy night, an' Ike, he's sorter shy of givin' me his unbiased opinion on my conduct, becase he remembers dat I'se mighty handy wid de flat iron; but dere ain't nothin' to hold back our friends from bein' perfectly honest, an' doing deir full duty by us.

"After dey is done riled Ike, an' got my back up, by tellin' us of our back-slidin' for our own good, dere ain't nothin' to hinder 'em from stayin' out of our way ontell we cools off, an' hit's safe to come in our neighborhood once mo'.

"Yassum, des a plain, common enemy wouldn't dast to say to you de things dat yo' best friend does, an' dat's de reason dat I thinks dat maybe we ain't got so much call to weep over de sorerrs of de friendless, after all.

"What makes me say all dis is dat I'se des been havin' sperunce dat has sorter busted de halo round friendship for me, an' made me kinder

hone for de society of dem what don't know me enough not to be polite, an' don't love me enough to feel lak dey is got de right to tromple over my feelin's.

"Yassum, I disremembers ef I ever is been stabbed in de back by anybody but a friend, an' de wust of hit is dat when dey gits out deir razors an' goes for you dey knows des whar dey kin bring de blood de quickest.

"Now, de odder day I done put on my new frock, an' my Fall hat with a fowl 'bout de size of a Thanksgivin' turkey a-settin' in a nest of green ribbings on hit, an' as I turned away from my lookin' glass I thinks to myself dat ef I does say hit myself, I'se a mighty sportly lookin' cul-lud lady. An' dat put me in sech a good humor dat I went down de street so full of de milk of human kindness dat I'd a turned into butter ef you had a shook me.

"Well, bein' as how things was, I thought dat I'd make a few visits 'mongst my friends, so de fust place I dropped in was Sally Ann's. Sally Ann, she's one of dese heah stringy, scrawny, starved lookin' kind of women dat looks lak deys been kept on half rations all deir life, an' she had on a dirty old Mother Hubbard dat warn't on speakin' terms wid de wash tub, an'

when I sat down on a cheer dat kind of creaked an' groaned under my weight an' looked at my silk frock, I sorter gin thanks dat I warn't lak some odder women I might mention, an' den I waited for Sally Ann to pass me de compliments 'bout my looks.

"But bless yo' life, Sally Ann fetched a groan an' looked at me wid a sorrerful lookin' eye. 'Sis Mirandy,' says she, 'is you ever tried anything for dat fat? Hit sho'ly am a sad sight to see anybody gittin' a figger lak yo's, an' hit seems to me dat ev'y time I sees you you has done put on 'bout ten pounds mo' flesh, an' is a inch bigger round de waist. 'Cose I wouldn't mention de fact to you, 'ceptin' dat you an' me is sech good friends dat I hates to see you losin' yo' good looks, an' gittin' mo' an' mo' lak a feather-bed, for I knows dat fat folks is kinder sensitive, an' maybe fat's a jedgment, anyway, sent on you to keep you humble. But ef I was you I suttinly would try starvin' myself, an' walkin' fo' miles on a empty stomach, an' doin' dem physical culcher exercises to try to bring myself down to a straight front figger.'

"Now, ef Sally Ann had des been a acquaintance I'd a give her back as good as she sent, but bein' as how she was a friend I swallowed hard,

an' 'lowed dat I better be a-movin' along, an' took my foot in my hand an' left.

"De next house I went to was Sis Alviry Sniggers, what's mighty set on style, an' I sho'ly did feel lak I'd squush Sis Alviry wid dat new bonnet, but Sis Alviry she took one look at hit through her spectacles, an' den she say:

" 'Sis Mirandy, dat's a mighty fine bonnet you got on, but don't you think dat hit's 'bout twenty years too young for you? 'Cose ef me an' you hadn't been sech intimate friends ever sence we was gals, I wouldn't pass no remarks on hit, but bein' as how we is mos' lak sisters, I feels lak I ought to save you from makin' a figger of fun of yo'self by wearin' a hat dat would mo' become yo' daughter dan hit does you, for dere ain't nothin' dat makes a ole woman look so much lak a plum fool as one of dese heah hats all trimmed up wid birds, an' ribbons, an' things.'

"I had to pass dat along, too, on account of Sis Alviry's friendship houndin' her on to take my pleasure out of my bonnet, but I wasn't enjoyin' her conversation enough to make me want to linger, so I segasuated on, an' de fust news I knowed I bumped into Sis Maria, who is one of de zorters in de chu'ch, an' de leader of de

prar meetin', an' when she see my silk dress she looked mighty mournful.

" 'Sis Mirandy,' says she, 'ef I wasn't one of yo' true friends I'd let you go yo' way to destruction widout liftin' my voice, but bein' as how me an' you is sech good friends an' neighbors, I feel dat de call is laid on me to warn you against yo' besettin' sin, which is vanity. You ought to pray, Sis Mirandy, to be delivered from de temptations of silk frocks, an' feather bonnets, an' from a-dressin' yo'self up. You is a good woman, Sis Mirandy, but I wouldn't be a faithful friend ef I didn't pint out to you dat you is mighty puffed up wid pride an' vain-glory, which am unbecomin' a Christian, an' a woman dat ain't no better lookin' dan you. 'Cose ef you was young an' pretty, hit might be excused, but at yo' time of life, an' wid yo' figger, dere ain't no justification for hit.'

" 'Bout dat time hit begun to look to me dat home was de safest place for me, an' so I made a bee line for hit, but I hadn't been dere fo' minutes, fo' here comes Sis Sally Sue. An' she ain't no sooner got dere an' sunk down in a cheer dan she began:

" 'Sis Mirandy,' says she, 'I'se got a mighty

onpleasant thing to do, but I ain't one of dem friends what shirks deir duty. Nawm, I says to myself when I heered dat Ike was a-makin' sheep's eyes at Gladys Geraldine, an' a-walkin' by her house of moonlight nights, dat hit's my duty as Sis Mirandy's oldest friend to go an' tell her 'bout hit, for ef her friends don't tell her de chances is she never will know hit. Friendship is a mighty sacred thing, Sis Mirandy,' she goes on a-rollin' up her eyes at de ceilin' wid a pious look, 'but I'se always ready to sacrifice myself for hit, an' hit was me dat told de Deaconses how folks was a-talkin' 'bout deir gal Betty, an' open de eyes of Sim Johnsing to de fact dat his wife warn't no better dan she ought to be.'

"Wid dat I riz up an' put Sis Sally Sue out of de do', an' sence den when I wants any company I'se been runnin' wid folks dat don't know me well enough to tell me de truth. An' I'se been a lot mo' peaceable, an' dat's what makes me wonder ef de friendless is so bad off after all.

"Maybe dey has consolations."

X

Our Enemies

“**D**IS mawin’,” said Mirandy, “as I was a-fetchin’ yo’ clothes home I met up wid Sis Marthy, an’ I stopped to pass de time of day wid her.

“‘Well, Sis Marthy,’ I said, ‘how does yo’ symptoms seem to segasuate?’

“‘Oh, Sis Mirandy,’ spons she a bustin’ into tears, ‘I’se a travelin’ through de low ground of trouble an’ tribulation.’

“‘How so?’ I axes.

“‘Oh, Sis Mirandy,’ she moans, ‘I ain’t got no friends. Dere ain’t nobody dat loves me.’

“‘Well,’ I axes, ‘you ain’t run out of folks dat hates you, is you?’

“‘Nawm,’ she spons wid a sob.

“‘Shoo, den,’ I says, ‘you ain’t got nuthin’ to worry over, for let me tell you—one real hefty, able-bodied enemy will do you mo’ good dan fifty friends.

“‘What do friends do for you? Dey comes

and eat up our vittels, an' borry our new flower bonnets, an' a little change dat dey forgits to pay back, but our enemies ain't got de privilege of comin' an' settlin' down on us, so dey's money in our pocket.

" 'Did you ever heah of anybody dat ev'ybody liked dat ever had a dollar? Popularity is de fust mile post on de road to de po' house. You see one of dese heah men whut's hail-fellow-well-met wid ev'ybody, an' dat ev'y Tom, Dick, an' Harry slaps on de back, an' calls by his fust name, an' when he dies de preacher has to pass de hat 'roun to git de money to bury him wid.

" I tell you, Sis Marthy, dat friends is 'bout de most expensive luxury dat anybody can indulge in, an' dat's why de folks dat gits rich, don't never have none. You don't heah of nobody whut's hangin' on de neck of dat Mr. Rockingfeller, or dat loves Mr. Carnegie lak a brother, does you?

" But enemies is cheap. You don't have to feed 'em, nor buy no drinks for 'em, nor waste no time entertainin' 'em, nor set up wid 'em when dey is sick. All dat dey expect from you is des to give 'em de cold shoulder an' a dis-contemptuous look when you passes 'em by.

" We talks a lot of foolishness about de

power of love, but it's de power of hate dat makes us git up an' do things. As long as we are in de bosom of our friends, who lak us no matter wedder we do anything or not, we jest settles back an' takes life easy. But des let a enemy come along, one of dese heah sneerin', fleerin' devils dat looks at you slanch wise, an' laughs a laugh dat makes you want to choke him, an' den you gits busy. You rolls up your sleeves, an' spits on your hands, an' grits your teeth, an' hits do or die wid you, an' dat one measly little enemy has done mo' for you dan forty-leven friends did.

" 'An' de funny thing is dat we'll do more for our enemies dan we will for our friends. I know how dat is myself. When Sis Sally Sue, what me an' her has been lak twinises ever since we was born, is coming to see me, I des sort of gives de house a lick an' a promise kind of cleanin' up, an' I des lets her take pot-luck dinner.

" 'But when Sis Marietta, what she an' me has hated each odder lak pisen since we had dat run-in togedder at de chu'ch fair, is gwine to drap in an' pay me a call, I sweeps under de beds an' dusts behind de pictures, an' puts out fresh tidies on de chairs, an' I has some cake an' wine

settin' around handy lak I ain't used to eatin' nuthin' else, for I ain't gwine to have dat long-tongued snake a-gwine around tellin' dat ole Mirandy is a shiftless housekeeper dat lakly starves her fambly, an' is dat stingy dat she begrudges company a bite to eat.

" 'An' whut makes me wuk my fingers to de bone a-takin' in washin' to buy me a three-cornered hat, an' one of dem harem-scarem skirts? Is hit fur de sake of Sis Becky, whut's my friend, an' dat I'll look good to in any kind of ole dudds? Nawm. Hit's for Sis Luelen, whut I can't abide, dat I does all of dat extra wuk, so dat I can flaunt myself down de chu'ch isle of a Sunday mawnin', a rattlin' as I walk, an' a shakin' my silk petticoats in front of her ve'y face, so dat she is dat filled wid envy dat she can't hear whut de preacher says.

" 'Yessum, Sis Marthy,' I goes on, 'we'll do more for hate dan we will for love, an' hit's our enemies dat help us, an' de way I catch a good husband was by baitin' de hook wid spite.

" 'You know dat when Ike was a young man he sho'ly was a buck nigger, an' all de gals was a hotfootin' hit after him, an' tryin' to tole him in wid angel's food, an' chicken fixins, an' sich lak, but he et dere good cookin', an' flew de



*"When Ike was a young man he sho'ly was a
buck nigger."*

coop, an' was dat foxy dat none of 'em couldn't lay dere hands on him.

"Well, when I come along, I didn't waste no time over de cookin' stove. I cut my eye around an' I see dat dere was a feller named Sam dat de very looks of riled Ike lak a red rag does a mad bull. So I jest passed over Ike lak I didn't see him, an' begun makin' sheep's eyes at Sam, an' dat done de trick for Ike. He was jest obliged to take Sam's gal away from him ef he busted de traces doin' hit, an' by de time he done cut out Sam, he done led me to de altar.

"Dat's whut makes me say whut I do, Sis Marthy. Don't you worry none about not havin' no friends as long as you've got plenty of enemies. Our best friends is our enemies, for dey are de ones dat keeps us up an' hustlin'."

XI

Retaining a Husband's Love

“**D**E odder night,” said Mirandy, “Sis Cynthy, whut is one of dese heah trouble gatherers whut ain’t never happy unless she is a-settin’ up nussin’ a secret sorrer, comes to my house, an’ after we done pass de time of day she heave a sigh dat busted fo’ buttons off de middle of de back of her shutwaist.

“ ‘Sis Mirandy,’ says she, ‘whut is dis world a-comin’ to? For hit’s done got so you can’t believe half you see, an’ nothin’ dat you hears.’

“ ‘Dis shorely am a vale of lies and liars,’ I respons, ‘but what is done happen to you dat makes you prognosticate in dat tone of voice?’

“ ‘Well,’ says Sis Cynthy, ‘you know dat divorshee lady whut come to our chu’ch las’ week an’ deliver a lecture befo’ de Daughters of Zion on de subject of “How to Retain a Husband’s Affections”? She suttingly did talk most grand, an’ hit was a eddifyin’ discourse as I ever listened to.’

" 'Hit's a mighty funny thing to me,' 'spons I, 'dat all de women dat is gwine around layin' down de law about how to keep a husband is dem whut is done los' 'em, or old maids whut ain't never had 'em.'

" 'Dat's de true word,' 'sclaimed Sis Cynthy, 'but didn't none of us think of hit at de time; an' she was a talker from 'way back. She began by sayin' dat men was fickle an' prone to change as de sparks am to fly upward, and dat by de time a woman gets settled down into double harness, de man has most ginerally kicked over de traces.'

" " "What wife in dis audience," says she, a-pintin' a bony finger at us, "what wife in dis audience can rise up from her cheer an' say dat her husband treats her lak he did in de days dat he was courtin' her? Does he bring her violets when he comes home at night? Does he spend his evenin' holdin' her hand? Does hit take ten minutes for him to kiss her good-by when he leaves her presence? Does he tell her how beautiful an' whut a angel she is, an' dat he asks nothin' of Heaven but to make him worthy of her?

" " "No! A thousand times, no! You all knows dat when yo' husbands don't make a

sneak to de corner saloon after dinner dat dey sets around home in a way dat would make a clam on ice seem real excitin' an' lively company, an' dat, if yo' husband was to hand you out a few compliments about yo' pussonal appearance, or give you a kiss dat had a little ginger in hit, dat you would fall dead wid surprise.

“ ‘ ‘ ‘ An’ what, my sisters, is de whenceness of dis whereforeness, I asks you? Hit means dat yo’ husbands is don los’ intrust in you, dat deir affection is done simmered down to de lukewarm state, an’ dat hit is yo’ business to raise dat love to de bilin’ pint again.”

“ ‘ At dese words, Sis Mirandy, all of us turned sort of white aroun’ de gills, for dough we never had thought befo’ dat we was in any danger of losin’ our husbands’ affections, we see as soon as she pint hit out to us, dat dat was de ve’ y way our husbands acts; so we all leaned forward, stretchin’ our necks lak my ole domminecker hen does when she is waitin’ to be fed, whilst de lady speaker told us how to make our husbands fall in love wid us over agin, an’ retain deir affec-
tions when we got ’em.

“ ‘ I disremember a lot dat she said, but de main thing was dat we must all git thin, an’ slim, an’ willowy, an’ keep dressed up all de

time, an' coquette wid our husbands an' not let 'em feel too sure of us.

"Well, dat slim business certainly did git away wid me, Sis Mirandy, becaze I quit weigh-ing when I tilted de scales at 240; but when I went home, instid of pullin off my good clothes an' gittin' busy wid de cook stove, I set down in de parlor an' waited for Jeems Henry to come home.

"I lowed to bring de ole light back into his eyes, lak de speaker said, when he saw me so fixed up; but when he gin one surprised look at me, an' anodder at de cold stove an' no supper, he ax me what in de name of creation is de matter wid me, an' is I done gone out of my senses?

"At dat I roll my eyes at him, an' look coy, an' say, "I done see de preacher as I come home dis evenin' an' he suttinly am a pussonable man."

"Well," spons he, "maybe so; but ef I ketches dat flop-yeared hound a hangin' 'round heah I lay I'll break ev'y bone in his body."

"Den I rolls my eyes some mo' at Jeems Henry, lak I used to do when he was a courtin' me, an in de way dat he used to think was fas-cinatin', but I reckon he done forgot, for he look

sort of scared lak, an' poked his head in de kitchen do' an' holler out to one of de chillen to run for de doctor, for deir ma was sudden took, an' out of her haid.

" 'At dat I got up an' pulled off my good clothes an' cooked supper, an' things went on jes' de same at our house, dough all de evenin' I seen Jeems Henry lookin' at me sort o' slant-wise over de paper, lak he thought I done gone crazy, an' I was ashamed to tell him dat I had jest been tryin' to win back his lost love an' in-trust.

" 'An' dat's what make me say what I do, Sis Mirandy, dat dere ain't nothin' in dese heah recipes about fascinatin' yo' husband over again. Hit can't be did.'

" 'Maybe married women ain't lost deir husbands' love so often as dey think dey is, Sis Cynthy,' says I. 'As for me, I don't take no stock in dis heah love talk. Talk's cheap. De proof of a husband's affection is de way he treats you, not what he says, an' de test of love after marriage ain't bringin' home vi'lets; hit's bringin' home de pay envelope. As long as Brer Jeems Henry does dat, you ain't got no call to worry.'

" 'An' don't you fool yo'self about thinkin' dat you is gwine to retain yo' husband's affection

by keepin' him on de anxious seat. After a man is done been married ten years he ain't hankerin' after thrills: he's lookin' for peace.

" 'De trouble wid most women,' goes on I, 'is dat dey treats deir husbands lak reasonable beings, which ain't no way to treat a husband, for husbands ain't nothin' but babies wid beards. You got to pat 'em some, an' spile 'em some, an' spank 'em some, an' shet yo' eyes to deir doin's some, an' stuff 'em on what dey lak to eat, an' ef yo' does dat yo' can mostly keep 'em at home—or leastways dey's sure to come back to hit.'

" 'But ain't dere no way a woman can be shore of retainin' her husband's love?' axes Sis Cynthy.

" 'Narry a way, so far as I knows,' spons I. 'An' dat makes de intrust of maternony. Hit would be awful wearin' to be tied to somethin' you couldn't give away, or kill, or lose.' "

XII

The Superior Civilization of Man

“**I**CAN always tell,” remarked Mirandy with conviction, “when a man is dat henpecked at home dat he says ‘our britches’ when he talks about his pants. He’s de man dat when he gits out whar his wife can’t hear him is always a lambastin’ women, an’ layin’ ev’rything dat goes wrong, from de weather up an’ down, at deir door. Yassum, de man whut crows de loudest abroad, sings de smallest on his own roost pole.

“Now dere’s Br’er Jenkins dat dasn’t call his soul his own when Sis’ Jenkins is around, but, sakes alive, you ought to jest hear him when he gits up in de pulpit whar nobody can’t dispute him. De way he wades into women is jest plumb scandalous, an’ last night he shorely was on a high horse, caze he been readin’ somethin’ in de paper dat kinder backed him up. Of cose, de men in de congregation is a-feared to hold up his hands, no matter what dey thinks.

Fer dey's mos'ly married, an' is got to go home wid deir wives.

"But dis piece in de paper say dat one of dem college perfessers is done bust loose again, an' dat he say dat women is lots mo' uncivilized an' heathenish dan men is, an' dat ef he had a-been raised by his Pa, instead of by his Ma, dat he would a-been lots mo' of a perfect lady dan whut he is.

"When Br'er Jenkins tell about dat, he fetches a sigh and says, 'How true dat is!' an' Br'er Sim starts to holler 'Amen!' but he happen to ketch Sis' Tempy's eye an' he changes hit to a kinder groan. Den Br'er Jenkins go on to tell how de perfesser say dat de Pas ought to fetch up de chillen so as to give 'em de benefit of de elervatin' masculine inflooence, an' at dat I sing out:

"'Bless Gord, let de good day come!'"

"Fer I specs dat's one view dat de women is gwine to chip in mighty lively wid. Yassum, hit suttinly would be handy to have a husband an' father around de house dat would walk de colic, an' scrub de chillen's faces, an' give 'em bread an' molasses ev'y time dey cried fer hit, an' nuss em when dey was sick, an' put 'em to bed at night, an' all de time you could set back

easy in yo' cheer, a-knowin' dat dey was a imbibin' de nice, gentle, refined ways of men, 'stead of gittin to be rough an' rude lak women.

"Yassum, dat shorely would be de millennium dat de Good Book tells about, whar de chillen cease from troublin' an' de mothers are at rest, an' dey can't hurry hit up too much fer me. Hit always looked lak to me dat dere warn't enough partnership in de chillen, noway. I don't see why a Ma should be ten times as much a Ma, as a Pa is a Pa. But dat's de way hit wuks. Ike, he never claims our chillen but about two minutes a week. De balance of de time dey's mine. When little Teddy Rooster-felt is dirty, an' bad, an' has broke de neighbor's window, he says:

"Woman, look whut yo' chile has done did!" but when dat angel chile fetches home de prize from de Sunday school, Ike, he stands on de street corner, an' swells out his chist, an' brags about 'his son.'

"Howsomever, dat ain't neder here nor dere. Whut I wants to know is how dat college professor found out dat women is mo' oncivilized dan men, an' dat fathers have a mo' refinin' inflooence on chillen dan mothers has?

"Cose, I'se jest a po', ignorant ole woman,

an' I ain't gwine spute wid a learned perfesser in a college, but all de men whut I ever knowed thought dat you raised a baby lak you did a setter pup, an' dat de best thing to do when one got to cryin' was to git so far away, an' so interested in a crap game dat dey couldn't hear it caterwaulin'.

"Den hit seems lak to me dat I kinder took notice dat hit is men, an' not oncivilized women, dat takes delight in seein' things git hurt. I disremember ever seein' women set two dogs to chew each odder up, an' ef any of de mother's clubs ever backed a prize fight, or any sister in good an' regular standin' in de chu'ch ever paid \$25 for a seat to see men batter each odder to pieces, I never heard of hit.

"Yit when de perlice raided de barn whar dey was havin' whut dey called a glove contest, de nex mawnin' me, an' Sis' Tempy, an' Sis' Hannah, an' all de odder deacons' wives had to hustle around an' pay our husbands out of de calaboose.

"An' as fer war—my land, but dey wouldn't be no mo' war ef dere was only women in de world. Cose day'd git mad, an' sass each odder over de back fence, an' maybe dere might be a little hair pullin', but de fust time any lady

got scratched so de blood come all de balance of de women would throw down deir weapons, an' run an' try to bring her to wid smellin' salts. Den dey's all set down together an' have a good cry, an' say dat dey reckon dey didn't mean all dey said, an' den dey'd kiss an' go home, an' borrow somethin' fer supper jest to show dat dey was neighborly once mo'.

"Maybe dat perfesser is right, dat men is mo' civilized dan women, but did you ever see a house dat men live in widout no woman around? De blackin' brush will be on de mantlepiece, an' de dirty dishes on de table, an' de tea kettle on de bed, an' de clothes will be strewed from one end to de odder, an' de dust will be a mile thick over ev'ything. Yassum, dat's so. When I goes away an' leaves Ike to keep house de only clean thing I finds when I gits home is de towel.

"An' hit's de same way 'bout dressin' up. My land, but ef de women was all dead de men would be a gwine roun' in blankets befo' de year was out, an' wid beards so long dat dey would have birds' nests in 'em.

"Men don't dress up fer each odder. Dey primps up for women. Befo' a man is married he fixes himself up to try to ketch some gal, an' after he's married he dresses up caze his wife

make him, an' to save a fambly argyment. Yassum, ef I had a dollar fer ev'y time I'se made Ike put on a clean shut when he didn't want to, I specs I could buy out Mr. Rockinfeller an' float away on seas of kerosense.

"Yassum, hit shorely am wonderful whut dem perfessers diskivers, an' I wonders how dey does hit, an' how dey happen to find out dat women is mo' oncivilized dan men. To me hit looks lak dat men an' women is much of a muchness —case ef dey warn't dey wouldn't match so well."

XIII

Other People's Children

"**H**IT ain't to say dat I is jest edjactly fell out wid Cynthy Ann Jones," said Mirandy with a judicial air. "Nawm, dere ain't no words passed betwixt us, an' we'se still friends enough to borry back an' forth, but I'se des sorter cooled off, an' slacked off in visitin' of her.

"I ain't a-aspersin' her character, nor a-castin' no alligators at her, an' I hates to say hit, but Cynthy Ann ain't de woman she used to be, an' dere ain't de pleasure in gwine to see her dat I used to sperunce befo' dat miserable little measly chile of hers was bawn.

"Yassum, she's a changed woman for sho', for, whereas she used to be de mos' entertainin' pusson dat you could find in a Sabbath day's journey, as Br'er Jenkin says, now she's got to be dat tiresome an' wearyin' dat I is sorter kinder passed her by, an' she don't never see me ef I sees her fust.

"Still ole friendship is ole friendship, an' for de sake of de time when we was gals togedder, de odder day, I puts on my bonnet an' went over to see her, for I wanted to tell her 'bout my Ma'y Jane havin' caught Si Reeves for a beau, whut's got a home of his own, an' money in de bank. Furdermo' I 'lowed to prognosticate 'bout my son Thomas Jefferson Abraham Lincoln bein' 'lected de President of de Black an' Tan Football Club, an' also I laid off to give her a treat by repeatin' to her all de smart things dat my little Teddie Roosterfelt, whut suttinly am a bawn genius ef dere ever was one, is done an' said.

"I thought hit would kin' of cheer her up to hear all 'bout my chillun, whut is always doin' an' sayin' interestin' things dat hit would tickle anybody to heah 'bout. But, ef you'll believe me, I never got de chanst to tell one single thing 'bout 'em, for Cynthy Ann spend de whole endurin' time a remarkin' 'bout dat cymblin' headed, cross eyed, bandy legged brat of hern—as ef anybody in de world wanted to heah 'bout him, or would listen to his ma's account of his smart speeches, ef dey could help deirselves.

"Dat's whut makes me say dat I ain't a-takin' up Cynthy Ann's time a-visitin' her, for ef dere

is anything dat gits on my nerves, hit is to hear dese women whut's got onery chillen, a-settin' up a-tellin' 'bout how cute deir offspring is, whilst I, dat really could entertain de company by relatin' de smartness of my little Teddy Roosterfelt, has got to set up wid my mouf shut becaze dey don't leave me no time to speechify in.

"Hit sholy is curis whut idjits women kin be 'bout deir chillen, an' I thanks de good Lawd dat I ain't lak dem gump mothers dat thinks dat dey is hatched out a lot of swans when ev'ybody else kin see dat de brood ain't nothin' but plain, web-footed geese.

"Yassum, I sho'ly kin see my chillen lak dey is, an' ef dey had any faults I would know hit, an' de reason dat I thinks dey is des 'bout pfect is becaze dey is. 'Cose I can't help knowin' dat Ma'y Jane is de best lookin', an' is got de finest figger, an' is de smartest an' de peartes' gal in de chuch, an' dat Thomas Jefferson Abraham Lincoln is de handsomest an' de smartest young man in de block, an' dat little Teddy Roosterfelt would git de blue ribbon in any baby show ef he got his desserts.

"Dem's des plain facts, an' de reason dat I don't never hold back 'bout spostulatin' 'bout



Kenneth

*"An' makes him sing a song dat is got forty
'leven verses to hit."*

'em is becaze ev'ybody laks to hear 'bout whut sech remarkable chillen does, an' when I spends de evenin' a-tellin' de neighbors 'bout de men whut's dyin' to marry Ma'y Jane, an' whut Teddy Roosterfelt said 'bout de po'k chops, I suttinly does feel shore dat dey has passed an entertainin' time.

"An' hit's de same way 'bout dem women whut is always havin' deir chillen come an' sing for you, or say de poetry pieces for you. My lan! but I wonders whar de fool killer is when Cynthy Ann calls in her little Benjie, dat ain't got no more tune to his voice dan a tomcat, an' makes him sing a song dat is got forty 'leven verses to hit, an' makes you pray for death to relieve your sufferin's after ev'y one of 'em.

"Cose it would be different, an' it would be a treat instid of a season of agony, ef he could sing de cute little things lak my Teddy Roosterfelt does, dat all my company always compliments, an' says as how he suttinly has got a wonderful voice for a chile.

"Yassum, other folks' chillen suttinly am tiresome, an' de way deir mas lets 'em behave am plum scandalous. When Cynthy Ann brings Benjie wid her when she comes to see me, he des rampages through de house lak a

red Injun, an' he busts de cheers, an' sticks up de furniture wid bread an' molasses, an' he's dat noisy an' troublesome dat nothin' but my pity for his ma, whut has to stand him all de time, keeps me from axin' her to leave him at home de next time she heads my way.

"Whut folks dat is got dat kind of chillen takes 'em around wid dem for, gits ahead of me, for when I sees a woman standin' on de front do' step a-ringin' de bell wid one hand an' holdin' a squirmmin' chile wid de odder, I knows dat I'se in for trouble, an' dat I'se gwine to spend de nex' hour a-keepin' one eye on de chany vases on de what-not in de parlor, and de odder on de plush album dat hit's a-smearin' up, whilst de ma discourses 'bout de funny way dat Sally or Susie played accordeon wid de preacher's hat, an' mashed hit in so dat hit was as flat as a pumpkin pie.

"Yassum, settin' on needles am a restful an' reposeful occupation to watchin' one of dem little demons wander around yo' house whilst you sets up a-sayin' how sweet an' cute hit is, an' a-thinkin' dat you would give five dollars to lam him over de head onc' onbeknownst to his ma.

"Cose dat ain't de way folks feel toward my

Teddy Roosterfelt, an' dat's why I mos'ly takes him along wid me when I goes a-visitin'. Hit always makes plenty to talk about. He ain't restless lak odder chillen. He's des nervous, an' dat makes him want to move around an' look at de things dey is got, an' he says de funniest things 'bout 'em. Hit would des make you die laughin' to hear him say: 'Whut a funny vase dis is. Hit's got all de back bus' out of hit, but you can't tell hit, caze hit's set in de corner!' Or maybe he'll ax me why hit was dat dey pinned a tidy over de wornout spot on de sofa, an' he'll ax me ef I won't git Miss Almiry Smith to show him her false teeth caze his pa said dat he 'spicions dat all de teeth an' all de hair she got, she got out of de sto'.

"Yassum, I suttinly am glad dat my chillen ain't lak odder folkses' chillen. How dey stands dem miserable, little squallin', meddlin', onery brats suttinly am a mystery to me, an' hits mo' of a wonderment still whut makes 'em think dat anybody wants to hear 'bout 'em.

"Ef dey had chillen lak mine, now, dey might talk."

XIV

Food Values

“ ‘SIS MIRANDY,’ says Sis Sairry Sue to me de odder day as she fetched a sigh dat made de roses in her bonnet trimble, ‘I don’t know whut dis world is comin’ to.’

“ ‘Well, Sis Sairry Sue,’ I spons, ‘dat question used to worry me a lot, an’ ev’y time things didn’t go my way, an’ de candidate dat I had put up an’ was suppo’ting for de deacon in de chu’ch warn’t elected, I jest thought dat de world was headed straight for de-struction, an’ dat dere warn’t nothin’ could stop hit, but I done took notice dat things wags along whedder I’m runnin’ ’em or not, or pleased or not, an’ so fur as I can see de jedgment day ain’t no nigher on us dan hit used to be.’

“ ‘I ain’t a-wishin’ to throw no cold water, nor yit no wet blankets on yo’ faith, Sis Mirandy,’ says Sis Sairry Sue, gittin’ mo’ an’ mo’ mournfuller, ‘but ef de world ain’t filled up now wid falsifiers, an’ prevaricators, an’ dem whut ain’t on speakin’ terms wid de truth, den I misses my

guess. You remember dat in de Bible days Ananias an' Sapphira was struck daid for lyin'. Well, Sis Mirandy, I 'lows dat hit is lucky dat de Lawd ain't dat quick on de trigger nowadays, for ef he was dere wouldn't be enough folks left to tote out de corpses an' bury 'em.'

"I ain't a-disputin' yo' pint, Sis Sairry Sue," I spons, "but I don't know dat I is so strong for de truth, for hit's been my 'sperience dat dem folks whut always brags dat dey speaks de plain truth to you is de ones dat always jumps up an' down on yo' pet corn. But whut's de matter wid you? Is somebody done gone an' deceived you?"

"Yassum, Sis Mirandy," spons Sis Sairry Sue, "I sho' has been deceived. I's done had my trustin' nature tampered wid to dat degree dat I don't no longer believe nothing I hears, nor half dat I sees."

"My goodness, Sis Sairry Sue," sclaims I, "but dis is awful, for de onliest way dat you can git along in comfort, especially ef you is a married woman, is for you to be of dat confidin' a disposition dat you shets yo' eyes an' opens yo' mouth, an' swallers ev'ything anybody tells you widout prognosticatin' 'bout how hit gwine to wuk."

" 'Dat was me ontil I got tukken in,' says Sis Sairry Sue, a-wipin' her eyes. 'You know, Sis Mirandy, dat I has been one of dem whut's took a lot of comfort out of readin' de newspapers, an' I ain't never been one of dem doubtin' Thomases dat axed wheder whut I read was so, or not. Nawm, ef hit was printed in de papers I jest took hit for de gospel truth an' believed hit. An' Sis Mirandy, dat was where I got my comeuppance, an' got into trouble. Las' week I was readin' in de paper 'bout dat big doctor in Paris whut says dat we's all dest like whut we eats, an' dat we's bloody-minded an' murderin' ef we eats butcher's meat, or meek an' humble ef we lives on garden truck.

" 'Honest, Sis Mirandy, dat man drawed such a picture of de horror of eatin' meat dat I felt dat I never could look a chicken in de face no mo', an' when I thought about de po'k chops I done et, an' me bein' fat, hit seemed to me lak I was one of dese heah cannibals whut we Daughters of Zion sends de missionaries to.

" 'But dat warn't all, Sis Mirandy; dis man says as how you can change folkses' dispositions by de way you feeds 'em, an' he says as how a diet of potatoes will make 'em lovin' an' affectionate, an' dat ef you feeds 'em on carrots hit



*"I ain't been one of dem dat axed whedder
whut I read was so."*

will soften deir hard natures, 'an' make dem whut is given to bangin' things aroun' at home as mild an' gentle as a lamb, an' dat spinach will cure a hot temper, an' make dem whut is bossy easy to lead, whilst green peas dest fills anybody up wid bubblin' enthusiasm.

" 'Dat sho'ly did sound good to me, Sis Mirandy. Hit sounded lak a new gospel dat was gwine to change matermony into one long, sweet song, for hit kind of delivered a woman's husband into her hands, an' as long as she could do de marketin', an' de cookin', an' feed her husband on whut she pleased, she could change him aroun' to suit her taste.

" 'Now you know, Sis Mirandy, dat my ole man Si is a mighty servigorous man. Yessum, he's a double-jinted man, wid a double-jinted temper dat's hung on a hair trigger, an' whilst I ain't got nothin' to say ag'inst him, bein' as how he is a good pvider, I will say dat dere is times when you would think dat a tornado had done bust loose in our house, an' dat 'sperience has done taught me dat when he gits up after supper an' jams his hat over his eyes, an' starts for de do', dat hit saves trouble for me not to ax him whar he's gwine, or when he specs to be back.

" 'Fudermo, Sis Mirandy, I can't honestly say

dat Si takes any interest in holdin' my hands, or dat he spends any time a-tellin' me how he loves me, an' I knows dat ef he was to pay me a compliment an' say I was a fine figger of a woman dat I would drop daid wid surprise. For dese, an' odder reasons, hit looked lak to me dat I done got a revelation when I reads how I could soften up Si's nature, an' turn him into a lover a-sighin' at my feet agin, by dietin' him up on vegetables.

" 'Of course, Sis Mirandy, I knows dat Si is sorter of a hard case, an' no light treatment ain't gwine to do him no good, so I cooks up 'bout a peck of potatoes, an' half a bushel of spinach, an' throws in a handful of carrots, an' den I sets Si down to de table to eat 'em whilst I watches how dey wuks.

" 'Well, dey wuks, Sis Mirandy, but not zackly lak de doctor proclaimed, for when Si finds out dere ain't no meat he axes me ef I takes him for a cow to eat grass, an' when I splains to him 'bout how dese vegetables is gwine to soften up his disposition, an' cure his temper, an' turn him back into a sweetheart, he grabs up de spinach dish an' flings it at my haid, an' den he follows dat up wid de potatoes, an' I reckon I must have been dodgin' b'iled carrots for de nex' five min-



*"Hit looked lak to me dat I done got a revelation
when I reads how I could soften up Si's nature,
an' turn him into a lover by dietin' him up on
vegetables."*

utes. An' den he went out an' slammed de do' behind him, an' when he come home he done got tanked up wid red eye, an' been in a fight, an' I gethered up de balance of de cold potatoes an' made a poultice of 'em, an' put it on his haid where somebody done batted him. An' dat's de reason dat I's lost faith in whut I reads in de papers.'

" 'Shoo, Sis Sairry Sue,' says I, 'don't you lose yo' faith in de cook-pot as de onliest way to get along wid a man. Maybe de vegetable cure don't tetch deir hearts, an' make a husband think dat you is young an' slim after you is ole an' fat, but dest as long as you sets him down to a good dinner you's gwine to look lak a angel to him. Dey talks a lot 'bout dis heah haylo of romance dat a man sees about a gal befo' he marries her. You believe me, when I tells you dat de man whut always sees his wife surrounded wid de smell of good cookin' is got dat haylo business cinched. You never hears of no fust-class cooks in de divorsch courts. Why, my ole man Ike couldn't tell me an' a fried chicken apart, we's dat much mixed up in his 'membrance an' affections.

" 'Naw, Sis Sairry Sue,' I goes on, 'don't you lose yo' grip on de cook-stove, becaze a woman

is a gonner ef she does dat. She ain't got no way to hold her husband's love. When de good Lawd give a man fo' times as much stomach as heart, He handed out a tip to wives, an' de mo' fools dey, ef dey don't take hit.' ”

XV

Breakin' Up a Match

“**I** DONE met up wid Sis’ Dilsey jist now as I was a perusin’ an’ meanderin’ up de street,” announced Mirandy, “an’ she suddenly was in de low ground of trouble and tribulation.

“ ‘What’s de matter?’ I axes her.

“ ‘De hand of de Lawd shorely is laid heavy on me, Sis’ Mirandy,’ she spons, as she fetches a groan. ‘My gal Sally Ann has done run off and got married to dat low down, triflin’, no-count Jim Robinson.’

“ ‘Huh,’ says I, kinder uncertain lak, caze dere ain’t no tellin’ which way folks is gwine to face around ’bout a weddin’. ‘I done see mo’ dan one ma-in-law what wanted to throw hot water on her daughter’s husband one day, hangin’ on his neck de next, so I stays on de fence ontell I sees which way de cat is gwine to jump.’

“ ‘Yes,’ went on Sis’ Dilsey, wipin’ her eyes, ‘I reckon hit’s a jedgment sent on me, Sis’ Mi-

randy, for bein' too proud sperrited an' up-hailed. Howsomever, I done my duty 'bout tryin' to break off dat match.

" 'Yassum, I argified wid dat gal ontell I was ready to drap in my tracks 'bout de probusness of marryin' a man what had to have de seat of his britches patched befo' he did de knees, an' what was better acquainted wid de crap game, an' de corner saloon dan he was wid de saw handle.

" 'Furdermo' I told dat drunken loafer dat his room was worth mo' dan his company at our house, an' when I found out dat Sally Ann was a slippin' out of an evenin' to meet him on de sly, I ups an' locks her in her room, an' yit, if you believe me, after I done all dat to stop her, de fust news I know dat gal clumb out of de window and skedaddled wid him.'

" 'I done heard tell dat you locked Sally Ann up in her room,' says I, 'an' I prognosticated dat you was tryin' to agg on de match, an' sic 'em on each other.'

" 'How come you say dat?' axes Sis' Dilsey.

" 'Caze dey ain't nuthin' lak puttin' a thing out of reach to make anybody set an' determined on havin' it,' spons I, 'an' a dead corpse would climb out of de window to run off wid de under-

taker ef you locked hit in. When I turns de key on a gal on account of a man hit will be to hurry up de weddin', an' to save buyin' her weddin' clothes, an' not to bust up de proceedin's.'

"'You can't talk any gumption into a gal dat's in love,' says Sis' Dilsey.

"'Nawm, dat you can't,' says I, 'an' as fer me I don't waste my breath tryin' to. All de same, dere's plenty of ways of headin' a gal off from makin' a fool marriage, an' dere ain't many matches dat you can't break off ef you goes about hit wid enough jubousness.'

"But wid dat Sis' Dilsey went on her way a-moanin' an' a-groanin', an' a-layin' her troubles on de Lawd, which is a mighty easy way of gettin' out of de mess dat you done brung on yourself, an' I didn't intercede wid her no furder, but I done give her de true word. Most of de bad matches is made by de foolishness of de parents. Dey drives dere chillen to the altar instead of shooin' 'em away from hit.

"Yassum, I reckon gals is de curiouset nation of people dat dere is in de world, an' you got to treat dem accordin' to dere curiousness. Dey ain't no good in appealin' to a gal's reason an' jedgment, caze she ain't got none. Neider

is dere any sense in talkin' to her 'bout principle, caze when a gal's in love de man is de principle, an' hit don't make no difference to her whedder he is a hoss thief or a preacher. Yassum, I done seen plenty of gals dat thought hit was real romantic for a man to have done served a term in de penitentiary.

"An' you got to go mighty slow about abusin' a man unless you want to have to feed him as a son-in-law, caze when a gal gits her dander up, an' gits to fightin' fer a feller dat she thinks is a po', pussicuted martyr dat ev'ybody's down on, hit's all over but her sneakin' her Sunday clothes out of de house, an' turnin' up de next mornin' wid a husband for you to support.

"Dat's huccome dat when dat onery Sim John-sing begun to shine around my Ma'y Jane dat I didn't spend no time a layin' down de law to dat gal. Nawm, I didn't say nothin' to her 'bout de fact dat Sim was one of dem folks dat was born tired an' ain't never got rested enough to do an honest day's work yit, an' dat ef she married him she was des as good to have to take in washin', to buy his vittles, an' clothes as a nickle is good for a ginger cake. Nuther did I set up of nights a-pintin' out to her dat Sim had a mighty hankerin' for red eye liquor, an' dat he done been in

de callaboose mo' dan once. Nor yit I ain't shet de do' in his face, an' forbid Ma'y Jane to soshiate wid him.

"Nawm, dat I don't. When Sim come I make him mighty welcome, an' when he go I set down in my cheer an' des shake my sides a-laughin'.

"What dat you laughin' at so, Ma?" axes Ma'y Jane, who I see is mighty taken wid Sim.

"Oh, I was des a-laughin' at what funny bow-legs Sim's got. Ef he wanted anybody to set on his lap he would have to tote a board along wid him," spons I.

"Yassum, an' dat finished Sim wid Ma'y Jane. She could a overlooked fourteen odder wives, an' one of dese heah continuous drunks, an' a thought dat she was gwine to be de ministerin' angel an' reform him, but when hit come to marryin' a man dat folks laughed at, dat was a gray hoss of anodder color.

"An' I always kinder suspicioned dat maybe I throwed some cold water on de case of Tom Gregory, what got to hangin' aroun' our house, an' sho'ly did look lak he had intentions. I was mighty nice an' kind to Tom, an' one night I siddled over to him, an' told him dat I hoped dat when Ma'y Jane married she would get a

real nice, industrious husband dat was handy around de house, caze Ma'y Jane don't know nuthin' 'bout cookin', or workin', an' she's mighty puny an' sickly anyway, dough she don't look hit, an' hit would be a comfort to me to know dat her husband would git up an' git breakfast, an' wash de dishes, an' save her all de hard work.

"Tom he says he hope so, too, but he never come back no mo', from which I jedged I had sorter discouraged him, an' dat he warn't no candidate for de job of waitin' on a triflin' wife.

"An' maybe dat time what I axed Sam Smith, what dey call a fascinater an' a ladykiller, to spend fo' days at our house one hot spell in August, mought a had somethin' to do wid Ma'y Jane tellin' him to take his presents back an' go. Lestways, I noticed dat after dat conversational set-to he an' Ma'y Jane never seemed to take no interest in each odder's society. I disremembers a hotter spell.

"Nawm, der ain't no trouble in headin' off de wrong fellow ef you knows how to work your rabbit's foot. Cose some folks say you ain't got no right to interfere, an' dey promulgates dat matches is made in heaven. My land! ef dat's de case, mos' of us is got mighty few friends

dere, an' we better look out fo' ourselves down here. Dat's de way I looks at hit, an' acts accordin'."

XVI

Theories

“HONEY, did you ever notice dat de better a thing sounds de wuss hit wuks out? Hit’s a mighty curious peculiarity, but dat’s de difference betwixt de way things ought to happen an’ de way dey does happen. Yessum, dat’s so, an’ hit’s got so dat when I hears anythin’ dat sounds so nice an’ lakly an’ natchul dat hit seems lak hit is bound to be true, whedder hit is or not, right den an’ dar is where I begins to sheer off, ’caze I done took notice dat most of dese pretty ideas kinder balks an’ buck-jumps when you tries to put ‘em into practice.

“Yessum, I’s done had my ’speriunce monkeyin’ wid things dat sounded des as easy as rollin’ off a greased log when you hear tell of ‘em, an’ dat was as hard as havin’ yo’ eye-teeth pulled when you come to doin’ ‘em, an’ hit’s sort of shook my faith in theories.

“I ain’t ‘sputin’ dat dey’s all right for preachers an’ lecturers an’ dem what makes dere livin’

by flingin' words around, but jest plain, ordinary, ev'ryday sort of folks lak I is, dat ain't got nothin' to do but to wuk for a livin', ain't got no business a-prodjickin' wid 'em. Dat dey ain't. Dey is too dangerous.

"Ain't I buy a mellojum on de instalment plan 'caze a man figgered hit out to me how I can pay for hit widout ever missin' de money or knowin' dat I is a-doin' of hit? Ain't I tried to follow de advice of dat ole maid what nor-rated to us at de Mothers' Club about how we hadn't ought to whip our chillen, but govern dem by de law of love an' kindness, an' dat say ef we never speaks harshly to de little angels dat dey'll always be good, an' polite, an' gentle, an' obedient? An' ain't Ike an' me, what's been united in de holy bonds of maternony for thuty years, almost land in de divorsh court becaze he was a-tryin' to act up to de words of dat lady dat writes in de newspaper, an' says dat de way to keep marriage from bein' a failure is for husbands and wives to treat each odder after marriage lak dey did befo'?

"Now I axes you ef all of dem theories don't sound lak dey was all wool an' a yard wide an' wouldn't shrink in de washin', an' ef you couldn't put yo' faith in 'em lak you does in

de Good Book? To be sho' dey does, but what come of all dat smooth talk?

"Ain't I still takin' in washin' to pay for dat mellojum? Ain't I had to wear out a bed-slat an' bust a rollin'-pin on dem chillen befo' I gets 'em back whar dere was any livin' in de house wid 'em? Ain't I still a-lookin' at Ike slant-wise, an' a-wonderin' if he ain't got a onesy conscience dat made him dat confectionery all of a sudden to me, becaze hit ain't natchul for a married man to hand out dat kind of talk to his wife?

"'Tain't dat I is a doubtin' Thomas, but I is got my suspicions, an' when dey comes a-prognosticatin' to me wid dere new-fangled idees about how you could bring on de millennium ef only you followed dere prescription, I des sets still in my chair an' fans myself, becaze I knows dat somewhar or anodder down de road dere theories is gwine to hit some little hard fact, an' bust up. Yessum, de theories would be all right ef dere warn't no facts, but when de two runs up ag'inst each odder dere sho'ly is a smash-up, an' when hit's over hit ain't de fact dat's hurt.

"Now dere's dat mother business. Hit certainly did sound good to me de fust time I went



*"De speaker was one of dese heah stringy
ole pullets."*

to one of dere meetin's an' heered about de new way of raisin' chillen by de law of love an' kindness. De speaker was one of dese heah stringy ole pullets dat didn't look lak she never is had any pussonal experience in de baby busi-
ness but de way she promulgated de doctrin' sho'ly was upliftin'. Dere jest warn't nothin', comin' or goin', backwards or forrads, dat she didn't know about raisin' chillen.

"She told about de-higher nature of chillen, an' how you must never say 'must' to a chile, an' how you would break hits proud spirit ef you whipped a chile, till my eyes fairly bulged out, 'caze I done been wrastlin' wid de chile proposition for lo, dese years, an' I done found out dat de only way I's ever been able to reach my chillen's finer feelin's is wid de hard end of a shingle.

"An' den de speaker, who suttinly must have been de seventh daughter of a seventh daughter, she was so wise, told us dat de way to keep a chile from disobeyin' you was never to tell hit to do anythin', but jest kind of insinuate dat you'd take hit as a favor ef hit would do what you wanted hit to do ef hit felt lak doin' dat way, anyway. Furdermo' she 'lows dat de way to act when a chile sassed you

was to set hit a good example by answerin' back polite instead of knockin' hit over wid a stick of stove-wood, which is de way I's proned manners into my chillen—an' dere ain't nary a one of dem dat dast hand me any back talk.

"Well, I went home des sloshin' over wid dem lovely new theories about how to raise chillen, an' ef you'll believe me, hit warn't three days befo' Ma'y Jane was a-sassin' me to my face, an' Thomas Jefferson Abr'am Lincoln was a-stayin' out at night, an' little Teddy Rooster-felt was a-kickin' about what he had to eat, an' dere was de wust lot of little devils in dat house dat you ever seed, an' den I see dat whilst dat theory about raisin' chillen by love sounded mighty good, hit didn't wuk servigerous enough on de constitution of real healthy chillen, an' den I waded into 'em wid a bed-slat.

"Co'se dat lady speechifyer was mighty wise, an' I ain't 'sputin' what she said about moral persuasion in raisin' chillen. I s'pec's hit's des de thing for dese heah weak-eyed, puny little chillen what answers to de name of Percy an' ain't got enough spirit to do nothin' but set still an' keep clean an' mind ev'rybody dat speaks to 'em. But when you comes to raisin' one of dese heah pot-licker an' b'iled greens chillen,



*"Little Teddy Roosterfelt was a-kickin' about
what he had to eat."*

what ain't never been sick a day in hits life an' is full of probishness, I's tyin' my faith to a hickory switch instead of moral influences. Yessum, when a chile's good de law of kindness is good enough for him, but when he's bad you wants to turn him across yo' knee an' argify wid him wid de fust thing dat comes handy.

"An' you can't put no mo' faith in dem theories about how to be happy dough married dan you can in de advice about how to raise chillen. Hit sounds mighty nice and plausible while folks tells dem what's been married for years, dat de way to keep dere husband or wife in love wid 'em is to act kinder skittish an' coquettish, lak folks does when dey is courtin'.

"Me, I had enough sense not to take any stock in dat doctrine, but Ike, he is a believer. Dere ain't nothin' dat he can't swallow ef hit is told him by a man in a black coat wid a stove-pipe hat an' a oily voice, or ef he reads hit in de newspaper. Dat's de reason dat I knowed dat trouble warn't far off when Ike comes home de odder night wid a sort of far-away look on his face, an' begins castin' sheep's eyes at me whilst I was a-cookin' de supper.

"I never let on dat I notice anythin', howsomever, an' he didn't say nothin' ontel de

dishes was washed up, an' den he called me in de odder room, an' jumps out from behind de do', an' gives me a smackin' kiss right on de mouth.

"'Huh,' says I, 'you needn't think dat you can git 'roun' me dat way, an' borry any money, caze I done save up dat fo' dollars to buy little Teddie Roosterfelt a new suit of clothes. Furdermo' hit goes into clothes, an' not into de crap game, an' dat's de word wid de bark on hit.'

"'Oh, Mirandy,' says he, in a hurt voice, 'how kin you talk dat way to me when I was jest actin' lak I did in de days when I was a-courtin' you?'

"Wid dat he sets down on de sofy, an' pulls me down beside him, an' rollin' up his eyes like a dyin' calf, he says as he squooze my han':

"'Dis little soft han' shall do no harder wuk dan smoothin' my fevered brow, or nestle in my own when de evenin' falls.'

"'Well,' spons I, 'ef I don't disremember, dat han' is done mo' washin', an' scrubbin', an' wrastlin' wid de pots an' pans dan hit has nestlin' in de thuty yeahs senst we was married.'

"But Ike went on lak he was in a tranch, an' didn't heah me.

" 'Hit shall be de aim of my life,' says he, 'to protect you from ev'y harsh wind dat blows, an' guard yo' woman's weakness wid my man's strength.'

" 'Whar's dat bucket of coal I axed you to fetch up dis mawnin, an' you 'low dat I'se dest as able to tote hit up de steps as you is?' I axed him, but Ike flung hisself on de flo' on his knees, and begun kissin' de hem of my dress.

" 'Angel face! Darling! Honey bird!' he sort of moaned, lak he had de misery in his chist, 'you're de only woman I ever loved, de only one I shall ever love.'

" 'All de same,' says I, 'I'se got my suspicion 'bout who give Ma'y Jane Jones dat flower bonnet,' an' wid dat I begins to back towards de do'.

" 'Light of my life, whar is you gwine?' says Ike, wid his hand on his heart.

" 'I'se gwine for de doctor,' spons I, 'for you sholy has gwine out of yo' haid, an' whar you belongs is in de bughouse, an' not in de fambly circle.'

" Den Ike splains to me dat he's been readin' in de paper 'bout how one of dese heah heart throb ladies says dat a man ought to keep up handin' out de same sort of talk to his wife dat

he did to his sweetheart when he was a courtin' her.

" 'Shoo,' says I, 'dem folks whut give dat kin' of advice ain't never mixed up none wid maternony. Dere ain't no man can pass out de same brand of soft soap to his wife dat he did to his lady love. Dere's too many facts in de way. Besides she done sampled hit, an' her faith's sort of shook.'

" 'I don't know how hit is,' says Ike, who was mighty cast down in his mind, 'dat advice sounded lak hit was all to de good, and would wuk like a house afire, but when I tried to put hit into practice, hit did seem to sort of slip a cog.'

" 'Don't you mind, ole man,' I says, 'dat's de way wid all dem theories. Dey looks mighty fine, but dey ain't no prop an' stay in real life, dey always gives way under you when you begins to lean on 'em.' "

XVII

Canned Voices

“**L**AND sakes,” exclaimed Mirandy, “I don’t know what we all is a-comin’ to, but hit looks lak to me dat ef folks don’t stop inventin’ things dere won’t be no peace an’ res’ in dis world nor de next.

“Now, dere’s dat talkin’ machine what dey calls de funnygraph, an’ what looks lak a cross between a tin horn an’ a work box. Hit was skeery enough, de Lawd knows, to see hit give a kind of hump to hitself, an’ den bus’ out singin’, or a-preachin’, or spoutin’ tin pan music dat put yo’ teeth on aidge, but ef anybody saw fitten to afflict deirselfs wid one of ‘em, hit warn’t nobody else’s business, an’ you could kinder pass ‘em by lak you does dem what performs on de pianola.

“Dey brought deir troubles down on deir own haids, an’ whilst you might cas’ round in yo’ mind a-wonderin’ how long hit would be befo’ one of dem funnygraphs would lan’ em in de

crazy house, still you didn't have no cause to pity 'em.

"But dat was becaze you hadn't prognosticated de true inwardness of dat contraptshun, for hit ain't nothin' mo' nor less dan a hant.

"Yassum, hits de conjur, an' no mistake, an' dere ain't no way to git away from hit alive or dead. I always was suspicious of hit, an' now I knows, an' ef Ike was to bring one of dem things home wid him hit would be me for de tall timber. Yassum, you would see one fat ole nigger woman breakin' de record at skedad-dlin'.

"What makes me say what I does is dis—las' night Ma'y Jane was a-readin' in de paper to me 'bout dat woman out in Colorado what's puttin' in de time whilst she's dyin' a slow an' lingerin' death by talkin' in a funnygraph, so dat when she's dead an' gone all her husband is got to do is des to turn on de machine, an' shet his eyes, an' dere she'll be a-handin' him back talk out of de grave, so to speak.

"'My Gord,' says I when I hears dat, 'dat po' man sho' has got my sympathy, an' what his sufferin's is gwine to be is somethin' dat I trembles to think 'bout, as he sets up a evenin' wid de goose flesh comin' out on de back of his

neck, an' his ha'r a-risin' on his scalp, as he listens to de voice of his departed Mariar a-tryin' to boss him from de cemetary!

" 'Yit he won't da'r not to turn on de machine, for he can't look dat funnygraph in de eye a-knownin' dat hit is loaded to de gyards wid her las' words dat hit is bustin' to turn loose.'

" 'Dat's so,' 'spous Ike, 'hit looks lak dey was tryin' to take away all de comfort from de mourners.'

" 'I calls hit sweet,' says Ma'y Jane, what is a gal, an' is got romantic notions. 'Think of de rapture of hearin' once mo' de voice dat is stilled!'

" 'Humph,' 'sclaims Ike, wid a meanin' glance at me, 'I ain't never yit seed no married man dat felt any call to can de conversation of his wife. Mos' of 'em gits all dey wants of hit as dey goes along, an' at de funeral dere's a sort of a peaceful feelin' steals over 'em as dey recommends dat de voice dat has done wo' itself to a frazzle a-tellin' dem of deir faults is hished forever.

" 'I hates to criticise a lady, but ef you axes my opinion of dat Colorado woman, I'se bound to say dat she's takin' a mighty unfair advantage of her husband.'

" 'Maybe,' says I, 'he's sech a po' onery, shift-

less sort of a creeter dat she couldn't git through specifyin' her opinion of him in one life time.

" 'Or maybe he's lak some folks dat I could name ef I wanted to, dat would drap all of his money in crap games, an' go traipsin off after yaller gals wid straight front figgers an' marshall waves, cepin' dat hit gives him de shivers to think what his wife is gwine to say ef she ketches him.

" 'For what does de Good Book say on dis pint: "De fear of his wife is de beginnin' of virtue wid a man." '

" 'I ain't a 'sputin' hit,' says Ike, 'but, all de same, I sticks to hit dat a woman says all she's entitled to say whilst she's alive, an' dat when she is dead an' gone her husband is got de right to some peace an' res'. I know dat when I'se a widower, an' begins to sorter feel my freedom, dat ef any funnygraph gits to monkeyin' wid me in de ole familiar tones dat rips a man up de back lak a buzz saw when he comes home 'bout three o'clock in de mawnin', dat I lay dat I'll fetch hit one swipe wid de ax, an' smash hit into smithereens.

" 'Co'se I specks dat jest at fust dat de funnygraph mought be a comfort to de bereaved widower, caze de house would seem kind of quiet an' lonesome widout nobody to quarrel wid, an'

to ax him what he did wid dat two bits she let him have out of his pay envelope, an' to remind him dat everything dat he laks to eat is bad for his stummick, an' dat he can't fool her by chewin' cloves, caze she knows de smell of beer when she sniffs hit.

"But after he gits over de habit of pullin' off his shoes at de front do' an' sneakin' in of a night, hit would be mighty wearin' jest as he settled hisself in de parlor wid his pipe, an' a glass, an' a few friends to enjoy a little game, to hear de funnygraph start up wid de remarks dat de dear departed was accustomed to makin' 'bout dem what flung away deir money in games of chance, an' got too famillous wid de demon rum, an' 'sociated wid dem low down folks lak de company what was present.

"No, Mirandy," says Ike, "don't you put yo'-self to no trouble to go talkin' no las' words in a funnygraph for me, becaze in case de Lawd should see proper to remove you fust, I'll try to wrastle along on what I kin remember of de things dat you is already done said to me whilst you was alive, an' yo' tongue was in good workin' order. You ain't got a thing to reproach yo'-self wid on dat score, for ef dere is anything dat ought to been said 'bout my faults an' weak-

nesses dat you ain't said, I disremembers what hit could be.

" 'Furdermo,' says he, 'dat funnygraph business whar de dead keeps on a-talkin' to you is a flyin' in de face of Providence. When de Lawd stills a voice, he wants hit to stay still, becaze de one dat's had to endure hit has got enough of hit.'

" 'Amen,' 'spons I, 'an' dat's de reason dat I'se tryin' to say everything I got to say to you whilst I'se here, an' you dasn't shut me up.' "

XVIII

Woman's Tears

“ ‘SIS MIRANDY,’ says Sis Hannah Jane to me de odder night, ‘has you done took notice dat women don’t cry so much in deses days as dey used to?’

“ ‘Dat’s de true word, Sis Hannah Jane,’ I spons; ‘tears is sort of gone out’ o’ fashion. An’ yit dere’s des’ as much to weep over as dere ever was, for I ain’t observed dat dere is any shortenin’ up in de crop of good-fo’-nothin’ husbands dat ain’t no use in de Lawd’s world but as tanks, an’ of triflin’ chillun dat deir maws is got to take in washin’ to suppo’t.’

“ ‘Dat’s so,’ says Sis Hannah Jane, ‘dere’s des’ as much for women for to weep over as dere ever was; an’ yit dey don’t do hit. Or ef dey does cry, dey cries in private. Why, when we wus gals, Sis Mirandy, a lady pusson dat warn’t always bustin’ into tears ev’ytme anythin’ went wrong was looked at sort of slantwise, an’ folks kin’ o’ whispered dat dere was somethin’ curis an’ onnatcheral about her; but nowadays when

folks sees a female a-moppin' of her eyes in public, let alone heavin' real sobs, dey lambasts her for bein' a fool an' not havin' any mo' taste dan to take on dat way whar people can see her, to say nothin' of disturbin' of de peace.'

" 'Dat's a fact,' spons I. 'Hit used to be dat a woman's idee of her whole duty to her fambly was to salt 'em down in brine; an' so, no matter whut they did, she cried over 'em. An' de measure of her affection for her chillun an' husband was a quart measure of her tears.'

" 'May be de reason dat divorsch is so common in dese days is becaze women is put up deir handkerchiefs an' got out a summons to de co't for deir husbands,' says Sis Hannah Jane. 'I done took notice dat dem women whut is real free weepers git so much fun out of cryin' dat dey kin' of cherishes deir misery, an' would feel real deprived ef de 'casion of deir tears was taken away from 'em.'

" 'May be so,' spons I, 'but I'se got my 'spicions 'bout dese heah weepers. You take hit from me, Sis Hannah Jane, dat de woman whut ain't nothin' but a hydrant of salt water dat's got de tap always turned on ain't got nothin' to her dat you can lay yo' han' on. She's lak Sis Caline.'

“ ‘ ‘ Hit’s a sad case dat I has shed a barrel of tears over, Sis Mirandy,” Sis Caline says a tellin’ ’bout some po’ fambly, an’ a-snifflin’ through her nose.

“ ‘ ‘ Dat sho is a lot of tears,” spons I, “but whut is you give dat po’ fambly, Sis Caline,” I says, “for I ain’t never heard yet dat dere was any nourishment in tears. Seems to me lak hit’s mighty slim diet; an’ hit would be mo’ comfortin’ to dem hongry chillum ef you would quit cryin’ a while an’ git busy cookin’ ’em up some-
thin’ to eat an’ gittin’ together a bundle of clothes for ’em.”

“ But Sis Caline takes out all her sympathy in cryin’ over de afflicted; an’ you ain’t never heard her sob none wid her pocket-book. Naw’m, I ’specs dere ain’t no cheaper way of helpin’ folks dan to cry over ’em. An’ de funny part of hit is, if you do cry over ’em, ev’ybody says whut a kind, good, sympathetic heart you have got; an’ dey don’t take notice dat all you draps in de contribution plate is a tear of pity.

“ An’ I don’t take no stock, nuther, Sis Hannah Jane, in de water cure for prodigal chillun. All my life I’s done see mothers weepin’ over wayward sons an’ daughters, an’ I done noticed dat dem tears runs off dem bad chillun jest lak

water off'n a duck's back. Hit's mighty touchin', Sis **Hannah Jane**, to see a po' mother's tears, but de trouble is dat dey touches de wrong party, an' any woman whut thinks dat she can make over her chillun by hydraulic pressure is sho' got water on de brain.

"Hit's all right for mothers to weep over de sins of deir chillun, but whut dey wants to use is not a handkerchief, but a bed-slat. Dat's de way I wep' over mine when Ma'y Jane an' Thomas Jefferson Abraham Lincoln got to de Smart Ellicky age whar dey thought dey knowed mo' dan I did an' took to runnin' round o' nights. Yassum, I jest waited up for 'em one night, but dere was fire in my eyes instid of tears; an' when dey got home, I done mo' in three minutes wid a trunk-strop to appeal to deir higher natures an' head 'em in de direction of de straight an' narrow path dan you could 'a' done by weepin' over 'em a solid month.

"Naw'm. I ain't got much faith in water-power. Dis am de day of steam an' gasoline—an' I kin supply dem both in runnin' my house.'

"I ain't a-disputin' de wharforeness of yo' prognostications, Sis Mirandy,' spons Sis **Hannah Jane**, 'but all de same, hit's my opinion dat women is done throwed away de best graft dey

ever is gwine to have when dey turned off deir tear-ducts. For one thing, dere ain't no odder way to wuk a man lak de water way. Dere's somethin' in a woman's tears dat jest dissolves his backbone an' makes him a kin' of pulp in yo' hands, dat you kin do wid as you please.'

" 'Dat's befo' you'se tied up wid him, Sis Hannah Jane,' says I. 'Don't forgit dat. Befo' marriage, when you cries, a man axes you to weep on de second button of his vest; an' he puts his arm aroun' you an' pats you on de back an' says, "Po' little darlin', don't cry." But after marriage, when you cries, he says, "For de Lawd's sake stop dat howlin' an' quit makin' a fool of yo'self." An' he slams de do' behind him an' goes to de corner saloon.'

" 'All de same,' goes on Sis Hannah Jane, 'dere ain't nothin' in dis world or de next dat a man is as 'fraid of as he is of a cryin' woman; an' why dem Sufferinyettes in England ain't had enough sense to set down an' weep on de do' steps of de House of Commons beats me. Dey would have done floated demselves into de franchise on a sea of tears long ago. Dem men would 'a' dried deir eyes on de ballot, jest to get rid of 'em.'

" 'Dat's right,' spons I, 'tears is de one argy-

ment you can't answer. I done tried dat many a time wid my ole man when we had a disputation an' I was gittin' de wust of hit. I dest busted out cryin', an' he'd say, "Maybe I'se been a brute. Do lak you want to."

" 'Yassum,' spons Sis Hannah Jane, 'dat's whut makes me say whut I do—dat hit sho is encouragin' dat our sex is got along past de cry-baby stage; but all de same, when a woman quits weepin' she's done throwed away de best weapon she's got. An' one dat she could always hit a man wid below de belt.' "

XIX

Women Popping the Question

“DE odder night,” remarked Mirandy, “Sis Alviry, whut is one of dese heah thin stringy, ole pullets dat oughter been in de fryin’ pan of matermony long ago, dropped roun’ to my house, an’ whilst we was a discoursin’ on de rights an’ de wrongs of our sect, she say:

“ ‘Well, thank Heaven, Sis Mirandy, dat dis is leap year, an’ hit gives women a chanst to up an’ pop de question to de men dat dey would like to have for husbands.’

“ ‘Huh,’ spons I, for whilst I believes in de rights of my sect I ain’t got much faith in our bein’ able to foreclose on ’em, leastways whar men is concerned.

“ ‘Yes,’ goes on Sis Alviry, ‘I don’t know nothin’ dat shows whut po’, down-trodden, female worms of de dust we women is so much as de fact dat we ain’t got even a say-so about pickin’ out de man dat we’se got to live wid, an’ cook, an’ scrub, an’ wash, an’ iron for, an’ take his back

talk for thuty or forty years. Yassum, we women ain't got no say-so in choosin' our husbands. All dat we can do is jest to set aroun', an' look willin', wid our fingers crossed for luck, an' put ourselves in de attitude to receive de blessing, in case any man is kind enough to come along an' ax us to tie up wid him.'

" 'Dat's so,' says I, 'an' dese days, wid po'k chops a-soarin' up in price lak dey had wings, de men is mighty slow a-comin' along.'

" 'I tell you, Sis Mirandy,' pursues Sis Alviry, 'dat ef ev'ry woman could pop de question, an' git her ruther in de way of a husband instid of havin' to take whut she can git, dere wouldn't be so many slack wives in de world, becaze many a woman takes out on de po', onfortunate man she did git her spite in not gittin' de one she wanted, an' had her eye on. Nuther, would dere be so many fool marriages, becaze a man picks out a wife, lak he does a chany dish, by de looks of hit, an' de paint on hit—an' den he goes home, an' raises a ruction, becaze whut he got ain't a iron pot. But a woman is got mo' love sense, dan a man has, an' she chooses a husband by de way he'll wear and come out in de wash of maternony.'

" 'Sis Alviry,' says I, 'bein' as how men is



*"Wid po'k chops a-soarin' up lak dey had wings,
de men is mighty slow a-comin' along."*

been sort of slow 'bout proposin' to you, is you gwine to up an' pop de question to one of dem?"

" 'Sis Mirandy,' she spons, 'ax me no questions, an' I'll tell you no lies, but I will say dat de case of Brer Eben, wid dat house full of chillun, an' no ma to look after 'em, goes to my heart, an' ef he don't know a woman dat's dest cut out to be a good step-ma, an' wife, I does. Furdermo' de forgiven name of dat woman is Alviry.'

"After Sis Alviry was gone, my daughter Ma'y Jane up an' say: 'Ma, do you believe in women poppin' de question?'

" 'Well,' I spons, 'women has got de right to propose, but Land of Goshen, a woman sholy is lackin' in probusiness ef she has to pop de question herself. Any woman whut can't tole a man on to de pint whar he axes her hisself ain't got enough sense to lead a blind goose to water. She suttinly is a dumb woman, an' she's got so little gumption dat she might jest as well been bawn a man to start wid.

" 'Shoo, chile, der's leventy-eleven ways to make a man propose, an' ev'y one of 'em wuks—caze heah's all of we all married women to prove hit.

" 'Cose women lay mighty low 'bout dis, an'

gives hit out dat de men dey marry jest chased 'em up to de altar an' catch 'em, but you better believe dat we wouldn't have no call to shake our feet at many more weddins ef it was jest left to de men to pop de question. Yassum, ev'y man dat's safe in de matrimonial fold has been helped over de fence by some woman.

" 'Honey, did you ever notice de curis ways a man acts when he pops de question? He's so surprised to find hisself doin' hit dat he most swallows his Adam's apple, an' his eyes pop out lak a skeered rabbit's in de brush pile.

" 'You see de wharforeness of hit is dis—when a man starts out to galavantin' aroun' wid a woman he ain't got no idee of marryin'. He jest wants to have a good time, an' he goes projickin' along, feelin' jes as safe as ef he had took out his insurance papers, an' den some day, fust news he knows, he hears hisself a axin' her ef she will let him wuk an' support her de balance of his life. An' he don't know how hit all come 'bout, but de woman does.

" 'Cose you has to use different ways wid different men, for men is own brudder to de mule—dey's powerful apt to balk befo' de matrimonial fence, an' some of 'em has to be coaxed, an' some of 'em has to be driven, an' some of 'em has to

be skeered befo' you can make 'em take de jump over hit.

"Now, dere was Si whut kept a hangin' aroun' Eliza Jane's ontel he wo' out de rockin' chairs, an' most et her folks into de po' house. Si was one of dese heah biggity men dat was so stuck on hisself dat he thought dat folks ought to be willing to pay out money jest to git to look at him, but, law, he didn't have no more idee of marryin' dan nothin'.

"But Liza Jane, she did, so whut does she up an' do when Si was a startin' home one night? She busts into tears. "Whut is you a cryin' about?" asks Si. "I'se a weepin'," spons Eliza Jane, "becaze you'se a gwine away, an' I won't see you ontil tomorrow, an' I don't know how I'se a gwine to stand hit."

"An' dat fotched Si, becaze he felt so sorry for anybody dat had to be deprived of his society dat befo' he knowed hit he was a tellin' her dat he wouldn't never leave her no mo'.

"An' dere was Brer Tom Johnsing, dat was one of dese heah bashful men whut gits right ash colored when dey looks at a woman, an' loses deir voices when dey speaks to one. How you reckon Sis Mariah got him spunked up enough to pop de question? She didn't, but

ev'y time he speaks she answers "Yes," an' at last she guessed right.

" 'An' I ain't a tellin' how I led Ike up to de proposin' pint, becaze Ike has done believe for thuty years dat he done hit all his lone self, an' dat whut brought matters to a head was along of me faintin', an' fallin' in his arms becaze I was so skeered of a snake dat we come across when we was takin' a walk, an' dat by de time I done come to he done tole me dat he loved me an' axed me to marry him.

" 'Ike say dat but for de accident of dat snake we might never have gotten married, an' I don't argify de pint wid him—but I specs I knows who put dat dead garter snake at dat particler spot in de road.

" 'Naw, chile, I ain't got no opinion of a woman whut is got to pop de question to a man. She sho' do need a guardeen.

" 'An' hit wouldn't do her no good ef she did propose becaze all de men would say, "no," for dis reason—a man don't never think well of nothin' unless he thinks he thought of it fust. Dat's de reason dat ef a woman was to pop de question to a man he'd be dat contrary dat he wouldn't have her, no matter how much he wanted her, becaze he didn't think of her fust.

Men sholy is curis critters, and hit suttinly does rub de fur de wrong way wid 'em for a woman to git de start of a idee wid 'em, an' de woods would be full of ble maids ef women took to doin' de courtin'.

" 'But shoo, daughter,' I says to Ma'y Jane, 'don't you worry none. Whut does a woman wid a tongue in her head an' a cookin' stove to her hand, to tole a man into matermony wid, need wid de right to pop de question? She don't have to. Any woman dat don't know no more dan dat 'bout how to git roun' a man an' manage him, ain't got no call to git married. Whar she belongs ain't in de holy estate. She was predestinated an' foreordained for de Spinster's Retreat.' "

XX

The Ethics of Clothes

“**W**HAT was de name of dat man what Brer Jenkins is always a-talkin’ ‘bout what said dat clothes didn’t make de man?” inquired Mirandy.

“I disremembers what Brer Jenkins called him, but maybe he knowed what he was talkin’ ‘bout. Maybe clothes don’t make de man, caze dere sho’ly ain’t much for anybody to set deir heart on in a pair of britches dat looks lak two jints of stovepipes hinged together, an’ a collar dat looks lak a busted chiny pitcher around de neck, and a hat dat looks lak de soup pot off of de stove.

“Yassum, dere’s a mighty good reason why men ain’t carried away by what Brer Jenkins calls de vanity of dress. Dey ain’t got nothin’ to carry ’em away, but wid women hit’s different, an’ hit am a mighty lucky thing for dat man dat he didn’t prognosticate ‘bout clothes not makin’ de woman, for ef he had, right den an’ dere he would a-loss his reputation as a prophet.

"I ain't sayin' nothin' 'bout dem fat ladies what de dressmakers laces down into a real slim, straight-front figger. Nuther is I a-talkin' 'bout dem bony females dat de dressmakers applies cotton batting to whar hit will do de mos' good.

"Nawm, dem kind of things is a secret twixt a woman an' her maker, an' how she does hit an' what she suffers ain't nobody else's business but her own.

"What I'm a-expostulatin' 'bout is de effec' dat clothes has on a woman, for hit suttinly am curis dat a woman changes her mind ev'y time she changes her dress. Yassum, dat's a fact, an' de minute I cut my eye at a woman an' see whedder she has got on her best Sunday go-to-meetin' bonnet, wid a fedder in de back an' a red rose standin' up in de front, or her ev'y day hat dat de chillen done played football wid, an' dat is bus' out on de side, an' hilt together wid a safety-pin in de top, I knows how to tackle her 'bout her chickens gittin' into my back yard an' scratchin' up de sweet peas dat I'se been tryin' to sprout in a box.

"Yessum, dem hats sho'ly is de straw dat shows which way de wind blows, for ef de woman is dress up, she's gotter live up to dat ostrich fedder an' dat red rose an' speak me polite, an'

dignified, but ef she's got on dat ole slabsided bonnet of hers, hit don't call for nothin' an' she kin des sail in an' 'spressify herself lak she feels 'bout folks dat is dat tetchous an' onneighborly dat dey ain't willin' for a po' little chicken to stray over de fence into deir measly little bit of a yard.

"Yessum, when youse gwine to argufy wid a woman an' wants to git de best of her wait till you ketches her in her bes' clothes, caze you sho'ly is got her sewed up a sack den.

"Yassum, clothes suttinly do effec' a woman's mind, an' she can't help hit, po' thing, an' what makes me say what I do is dat I'se des been de witness to a sad case.

"Dis mawnin' Sis Hannah Jane Simpkins come to my house a-wailin' an' a-weepin' dat de hand of de Lawd was laid heavy on her.

"What's de matter?" I axed her when she choke back her sobs long enough to drink half de pitcher o' beer dat I sent Thomas Jefferson for when I see her sorrer, for I done took notice dat dere ain't nothin' dat you can say to a pusson dat's in trouble dat is as comfortin' as passin' de beer can, an' sistin' on dem havin' a little drap mo'.

"Hits my gals," 'spont Sis Hannah Jane.

" 'What's de matter wid dem?' I inquired, 'for it always look lak to me dat ef dere was five lakely, sensible, industrious gals in de town hit was yours. Dey ain't full of foolishness lak my Ma'y Jane what's done been off an' got de higher education, an' dat turns up her nose at de wash tub, an' balks at de cook stove, an' shies away from de sewin' machine.'

" 'Dat's de true word, Sis Mirandy,' says Sis Hannah Jane, as she dreenes de dregs out of de beer can wid an' air dat says dat's she's so 'flicted dat she don't know what she's doin', 'dat's de true word. Dere warn't nobody dat could turn off a heftier day's washin' dan my Almiry, or dat could flute curtains nicer dan my Sally, or was a better housemaid dan my Lizzie, or dat could sweep a room cleaner dan my Sophy, whilst Anna Sue was dat good a cook dat she des had to pass her hand over de pot to make things tasty.

" 'But hits all over now, Sis Mirandy. Dey's all done knock off work, an' is settin' around home holdin' books in deir hands, or rollin' deir eyes at de ceilin', or a meanderin' an' a-perusin' around de street a-winkin' an' a-blinkin' at ev'y man dey sees.'

" 'De lan' sakes,' 'sclaims I, 'dey sho'ly is los deir minds. When did you fus take notice

dat dey done gone crazy? An' what makes 'em?

" 'Don't ax me,' 'spons Sis Hannah Jane, 'hit come on sudden. You know my Lizzie's been a-wukkin' for a actor lady what plays on de stage, an' she's gwine away an' she gives Lizzie a whole trunk full of clothes, an' Lizzie fotch 'em home.

" Well, no sooner is Almiry put on a long wrapper made of lace, an' pink ribbons, an' frills, dat has got a trail 'bout a mile long, an' is cut down dat low in de neck dat hit's enough to give you de rheumatics just to look at hit, dan she say dat she feels dat she's born to be a lady an' takes to wonderin' ef she ain't some rich pusson's child, an' axes me ef I reckon she could a-got changed in de cradle. Fudderмо', she says she can't eat pork chops an' biled cabbage, an' she keeps on a axin' for tea lak a sick pusson, an' says dat she's too languid to do any mo' washin'.

" Den Sally git on one dese heah tailor-made skirts an' shut waists an' she go out an' jine de golf club, an' Lizzie diked herself out in a low-necked ball dress, an' slip out de back do' an' go to de Saturday night hop instid of gittin' her Sunday school lesson lak she used to, an' Sophy gits on one of dese mussy, neglected robes an'

she 'gin to roll her eyes an' screech at the melojum, an' say dat she got a call to be a opry singer, an' Anna Sue gits a red frock dat is kivered wid spangles, an' a hat dat looks lak a flower garden done bus' loose on hit, an' de fus news I know she is a-prancin' up de street, an' de dinner is a-burnin' on de stove.

"'Yas, Sis Mirandy,' goes on Sis Hannah Jane, 'my gals is plum crazy, an' dey is des a-footin' hit to de asylum as fas' as dey can go.'

"'Shoo, Sis Hannah Jane,' spons I, 'don't you worry. Hit's des dem actor ladies' clothes dat is hoodooed dem gals. You go an' take dem frocks to de second-hand store an' sell 'em, an' dem gals will be a-sweepin' an' a-washin' an' a-cookin' agin des as soon as dey gits back into deir ole calico frocks.'

"Yassum, an' dat's de way hit turned out. Yassum, I know all 'bout de effec' dat clothes has on a woman. Ef you'll notice de time when a woman gives her husband back talk, an' spanks de baby is when she ain't dressed up.

"Now me—take me early in de mawnin' when I ain't tied up in no straight front an' is got on a Mother Hubbard, an' my sleeves rolled up, an' I is a servigorous woman what can lay down de law to a husband as well as de next; but on dem

evenings when I is dressed up in my silk frock,
wid a brooch as big as a saucer dat is a picture
of Ike, an' a gold chain around my neck, I is so
meek an' gentle dat butter wouldt melt in my
mouf, an' I lets Ike go out to de crap grame an'
pertends dat I thinks dat he has des stepped
around to de pra'r meetin'.

"An' I ain't took no notice dat I am a bit
different from odder women."

XXI

Worrying

“DE ODDER day,” says Mirandy, “Sis Nancy, whut is one of dese heah po’, slack, shiftless women whut looks lak dey was bawn wid twins an’ a dirty caliker wrapper on, stopped me as I was a-preambulatin’ home from de market.

“ ‘Sis Mirandy,’ says she wid a kind of a superior look, ‘rejoice wid me for I’se done come through. I’se got de light at last. I’se got de good news of de new gospel, an’ I couldn’t let you go by widout passin’ de blessin’ on to you.’

“ ‘Bless de Lawd for all his mercy,’ spons I, ‘but whut is dis newfangled religion dat you done ketched dat takes away all yo’ troubles?’

“ ‘I’se done jine de Don’t Worry Club,’ she says, ‘an’ all my ’flictions is done rolled off me lak water off a duck’s back.’

“ ‘My lan’!’ ’sclaims I, ‘but dat sholy is a miracle worker! But how does dis new faith wuk?’

" 'De secret of de wharforeness of hit is dat you passes into dat state of mind after you jines de club, dat you don't let nothin' pester you no mo'. You des brushes away your worries lak dey was flies, an' dar you is.

" 'I'se done seen de time, Sis Mirandy, when I traveled through de low grounds of trouble an' tribulation, ef things went wrong, an' de bread burnt in de oven, an' de meat warn't done, an' de chillun's clothes needed washin', an' Mose got on de rampage. But dat was befo' I learned de grip an' de passwords of de Don't Worry Club.

" 'But now dem little things don't trouble me no mo'. Ef de house ain't swept, an' de dishes is piled up in de sink, an' de beds ain't made, an' de chillun is dirty, an' Mose is a-mutterin' aroun' an' a-sayin' dat de only comfortable place he knows is de corner saloon, instid of bein' bodered about hit lak I used to, I dest sets down ca'm an' saterfied in a rockin' cheer, an' fixes my mind on de fact dat I is a charter member of de Don't Worry Club.

" 'An' I used to git dem narvous spells, Sis Mirandy, when de rent was comin' due an' dere warn't no money to pay hit wid, an' den I'd feel mighty bad when I'd see Mabel Maud had done wore out de knee of her stockin', an' dat my little

George Washington had a hole in de seat of his britches, an' hit would real upset me when de neighbors drapped in an' tole me how my chillun was a-cuttin' up on de street, an' prognosticated dat dey sholy was haided fo' de chain gang.

" 'But I'se done riz above all of dem trifles sense I got de light an' jined de Don't Worry Club. Now I dest lays back an' takes my ease, an' reflects dat a hundred y'ars from now hit won't make a speck of difference whedder de landlord got his rent or not, or whedder my chillun was ragged an' dirty, or dressed up to beat de band, an' dat nobody can't tell nohow how chillun is gwine to turn out, an' so dere ain't no use in borrowin' trouble befo'hand 'bout deir gettin' into de callaboose.

" 'Nuther does I aggravate myself any mo' 'bout whut we has to eat an' de cookin'. Ef I feels lak goin' to market in de mawnin' I does it, an' ef dere ain't nothin' comes up dat I'd enjoy do'n in de afternoon, I has a good hot dinner ready for Mose when he gets home from his wuk. But ef I don't feel inclined dat way I don't do hit, for I belongs to de Don't Worry Club, an' de things dat Mose says when I sets him down to cold bread an' de scraps of meat dat was lef' over from de day befo' don't trouble me none now.

" 'Yassum, de Don't Worry Club sho' is a prop an' a staff to a married woman, an' saves her a lot of elbow grease an' shoe leather, for instid of breakin' yo' neck a-toilin' an' a-moilin' tryin' to please yo' husband, and have ev'ything dest lak he wants hit, to keep him from knockin' you, all you got to do is dest to elevate your mind to dat plane whar you don't even notice when he is a-lambasting you for bein' triflin'. Or if he is you don't keer.

" 'Yassum, Sis Mirandy,' says she, 'I'se done found de road to peace an' happiness, an' de sign-bo'd dat pints de way is de Don't Worry Club.'

" 'De way you promulgates hit,' spons I, 'hit sho' is a grand doctrine, but is Brer Mose a-travelin' wid you?'

" 'No, Sis Mirandy,' Sis Nancy says, 'he ain't. I'se sorry to say dat he's a backslider whut's yit in de darkness. I'se done my best to convert him, an' I'se been a shinin' example right befo' his eyes, for I'se showed my faith by my wuks, but Mose is still outside of de fold, a-worryin' over ev'ything, an' I'se afeard dat I ain't never gwine to be able to lift him up to de higher life whar I is, for hit looks to me lak de less I worry, de mo' he does.'

" 'Yassum,' I spons, 'I specks dat's de truth,



"I worried de washbo'd so hard dat I sent Ma'y
Jane to de female cemetery."

for dat's de way I has noticed dat hit wuks out in most famblies.'

" 'How's dat, Sis Mirandy,' she axes.

" 'Well,' says I, 'dere's a lot of worryin' dat's got to be done in ev'ry fambly, an' ef one member of hit ducks his sheer, or her sheer, hit kind of piles de worryin' up on somebody else, an' dey's got to do a double amount of layin' awake at night a-tryin' to finger out how de rent is gwine to be paid, an' de grocery bills squared, an' de chillun kept offen de street out of de ways of de autermobiles. Dat's de reason dat you don't never see a husban' an' a wife a-gwine up togedder to give de right hand of fellowship in de Don't Worry Club.

" 'I'se seed a lot of women dat belongs to hit, an' deir husbands was po', tired, hump-shouledered lookin' men dat had to come home and git dinner of a night, after dey had been hard at wuk all day, an' dey had to walk de baby when it had de colic, an' wash de chillun an' sweep de flo's, becaze deir wives warn't pesterin' 'bout none of dese little things.

" 'An' I knows plenty of men dat is 'zorters in de Don't Worry Club, an' whilst dey sets up in de back room of de corner saloon an' eats free lunch, an' drinks beer whenever anybody else

will pay for hit, an' speechifies 'bout de folly of troublin' trouble ontil trouble troubles you, deir wives is a-takin' in washin' to suppo't de fambly.

" 'Yassum,' says I, 'whar you finds a wife or a husband dat belongs to de Don't Worry Club you will find dat de odder one of de firm is de president of de Mo' Worry Club. An' dey's elected for life, too.'

" 'Sis Mirandy,' says Sis Nancy, heavin' a sigh, 'I'se afeard dat you ain't in sympathy wid de cause, an' dat I can't git you to jine our noble s'ciety.'

" 'Dat you can't,' says I, 'I'se a good, fust-class free-hand worrier, an' I'se proud of hit, an' I wouldn't change ef I could. I'se always been a-worryin' housekeeper, an' dere ain't a better kep' house in dis town dan mine.'

" 'I'se always been whut dey call a worryin' mother—an' dere ain't none of my chillun dat warn't kep' clean, an' well fed.'

" 'Den, when dey got a little bigger, I worried 'bout deir eddication, an' I worried de washbo'd so hard wid my pestiments 'bout hit dat I sent Ma'y Jane to de female cemetery whar she got de higher culchah, an' Thomas Jefferson to de college whar he's gwine to graduate on de football team.'

" 'Yassum, give me de worriers ev'ytime.
Dey are de folks dat does things.'

" 'Don't you believe in de Don't Worry Club,
Sis Mirandy?' axes Sis Nancy.

" 'Well, Sis Nancy,' says I, 'I reckon de Don't Worry Club is a mighty good thing for dem dat is too triflin' to do anything, anyway. De least dey can do is to keep from pesterin' de worriers dat is doin' deir wuk for 'em, an' havin' to wuk overtime at worryin'?' "



*"I'd feel mighty bad when I'd see Mabel Maud
had done wore out de knee of her stockin'."*

XXII

Adamless Edens

“**M**EN sho’ly is lackin’ in gumption when dey git to prognosticatin’ ‘bout women,” remarked Mirandy. “Now, a woman kin see right through a man clean to his collar button, but ef you’ll give a man forty guesses ‘bout what a woman likes, or what she’s gwine to do, or what she thinks ‘bout anything, he’ll hit hit wrong forty-one times.

“An’ ‘sperunce won’t teach a man nothin’ ‘bout a woman neither.

“I’se been married to Ike for thurty years, an’ I’se ’sprecified myself ev’y day of dat time ‘bout my ruthers, yit when Ike wants to pacify me he fetches me home a nickel’s worth of choc’lates, when I hates candy, an’ hones after pickles, an’ when he goes to git me a frock, he buy stripes, dough my taste runs to spots, an’ den becaze I takes de skillet to him instid of offering up thanks befo’ him for somethin’ I don’t want an’ ain’t got no use for—for ef dere is anything dat riles even a meek, humble, gentle sperrited

woman lak I is hit is a misfit present—he hunches his shoulders up, an' says dat women is so curis dat dere ain't no understandin' of 'em.

"An' Ike's jest cut off de same bolt of cloth as all de balance of de men. Las' night Brer Jenkins was at my house, an' he put on dat kind of smirkin', smilin' I got-you-at-las' look dat a man wears when he's gwine to try to say some-thin' funny 'bout women comin' a mile off—an' he says:

"Well, Sis Mirandy, I 'specks you club women is kinder gittin' yo' trunks packed, an' ready to start, ain't you?"

"Whar to?" I axes.

"To dat place out in Siam dat de travelers has jest diskivered dat ain't got narry a man in hit. Dey says hits a mighty pretty place, all full of fruits an' flowers an' wid no men in hit to muss up de tidies on de sofa, an' smoke in de parlor, an' so I kinder figgered hit out dat all you women what is complainin' 'bout de way men does, an' layin' all yo' troubles on 'em, would hike out for dat Adamless Eden on de fust train."

"Huh," spons I, "I don't believe dere is any sech place, for whar dere is a Adamless Eden, dere's gwine to be a Eveless Eden, too.

" 'I lay dat ef dere hadn't a been no Adam a hangin' around in de bushes to make things interestin' for Eve, hit wouldn't a took no serpent to have tempted her out of de garden. She'd a broke out herself. Women ain't changed none, an' you can't make me believe dat you could pen up a lot of live ladies in a place whar dere warn't no men. Not whilst de walkin' was good, noway.'

" 'Why, I thought dat you women was always a layin' all yo' trials an' tribulations on de men,' says Brer Jenkins, 'dat's what de sisters what comes a-weepin' an' a-moanin' to me always says.'

" 'Dat's de true word,' 'sponds I, 'an' dat's de reason dat we can't do widout men, an' dat's why a woman what has got mos' any kind of onery husband is happier dan a ole maid. She's des got a sorter natchul misery instid of a bor-rered one.

" 'She's got a right to weep over ner sorriers, an' call for de sympathy of de congregation 'bout de way she's treated, whilst hit is des as much as a ole maid's character is wuth to her to shed a single tear in public. She ain't got no husband, an' people wonders what on earth she kin be worryin' 'bout.'

" 'An' dat ain't all,' says I; 'a husband is wuth de price des to have somebody to lay ev'ything on. Yassir, when things goes wrong hit sho'ly am a comfort to have somebody dat you kin light into, an' lambast, becaze hit has done rained when you wanted to go to a picnic, or you is dropped yo' bes' chany bowl an' broke hit.

" 'Hit don't make no difference whedder de husband has anything to do wid hit or not. He's dere, right convenient, an' he sho'ly is a comfort. My lan', but I suttinly does pity dem women what, when dey puts de lef' foot out of de bed in de mawnin', an' gits up cross an' cantankerous an' des achin' for a fight, dat ain't got no husband dat dey kin take deir temper out in jawin'. Yassir, hit's sech times as dat, dat a woman knows dat maternony is a divinely instituted ordinance, for ef hit hadn't been for havin' Ike dat I had a legal right to sass, dere has been times dat I'd a blowed up an' bus'.

" 'Yassir, dat's so. A husband suttinly am a handy thing to have around de house, an' mo' over you can't make a real home widout one. You des sorter got to flavor up de atmosphere wid a man, an' a few cuss words, an' a ole pipe to give hit any taste.

" 'I done been to plenty of dese heah manless

homes dat ole maids tries to make, whar dere ain't no dirt tromped in, nor no ole clothes lef' around, an' you don't have to kinder sleep wid one ear open, to listen to somebody fumblin' for de key hole long towards 2 o'clock in de mawnin', an' my goodness sakes alive, dere warn't no mo' interest to de livin' dan dere is in a pot of soup dat you done lef' out de pepper, an' de salt, an' de onions.

"Cose I ain't sayin' dat men ain't a lot of trouble. Dey is. I is been mad enough wid Ike to kill him, but I ain't been mad enough wid him to wish dat I hadn't a married him, an' dat's de way dat women feels toward men. Dey blames 'em for deir sorrers, an' yit dey wouldn't do widout 'em ef dey could. Ef dere wasn't any men, dere wouldn't be any broken hearts, an' ruined lives, an' women wouldn't have to slave deirself to death cookin', an' sewin', an' mendin', an' patchin', an' dey would be de mos' miserablest creeters in de world."

"Women is got lots of curis peculiarities," says Brer Jenkins, "an' no man kin understand 'em."

"An dat's God's mercy to us," spons I, "for ef men did, dey would wuk us to death, but," says I, "don't you believe dat dere is gwine to

be any emigration of de female population to
dat Adamless Eden, but ef you is heard of any
Eveless Eden, whar women is scace, I knows a
plenty of sisters dat you could sell tickets to befo'
sundown.

“ ‘A Adamless Eden—huh!’ ”

XXIII

Why Women Can't Vote

“**D**E reason dat women ain’t got no say so in de government,” said Mirandy, “is becaze you has got to wuk dish heah votin’ machine wid yo’ spine, an’ women ain’t got no mo’ spine dan a fishin’ worm. The trouble wid women is dat dey ain’t got no backbone, an’ dey ain’t to blame for dat becaze hit’s a long of de way dat dey was made. Now last night Brer Jenkins preached in our chu’ch ’bout dat man down in Egypt, or some odder foreign city, what is a diggin’ around in de place whar de Gyarden of Eden was, an’ he say dat ef dis man ain’t discovered de bone dat Eve was made out of he’s done found de next thing to hit. He’s done found de place whar hit come from. He says dat de men what lived befo’ Adam had one mo’ rib dan dem has got what lives after him, an’ ef dat missin’ rib ain’t in women, whar is hit? Dat’s what I wants to know. Whar is hit?

“Of cose, de findin’ of dat rib didn’t make



"I opens my mouth and shets my eyes."

no difference to me, becaze I done made my peace mo' dan thirty years ago, an' I'se been a sleeper in de chu'ch ever since. Mo'over I'se got de faith, an' ef faith ain't believin' what you knows ain't so, an' jest nat'chully can't be so, den I don't know what hit is. I does des alike about de doctor, an' de preacher. I opens my mouf, an' shuts my eyes an' swallo's whatever dey pokes down me widout prognosticatin' about hits inwardness or how hit's gwine to wuk.

"I ain't never been one of dem dat run after ev'ey new belief dat come along, an' dats de reason dat I ain't never took up wid dis heah doctrine 'bout folks not bein' made at de start of de creation but jest havin' growed. Cose ev'eybody to dere taste, but hit seems lak to me dat dem folks what laks to claim a monkey for dere grandpa has got mighty little pride, an' mighty little call to brag on dere fambly tree.

"But I ain't never had no trouble in believin' dat woman was made out of man's rib. What worries me is why de Lawd's choice fell on de rib which ain't nothin' but a sort of rafter to hold up a man's chist an' swell hit out, an' make him look proud, but dat ain't nowise important in himself, an' dat is about de easiest thing dat he can spare widout missin' hit.

"Cose I ain't a presumin' to criticise de Good Marster, but hit does look lak to me dat when he was a creatin' woman, an' had de whole man to cut from, dat he could a saved us a lot of trouble ef He had made Eve out of a few jints of Adam's backbone, insted of dat rib.

"Yassum, dat's so, for ain't a rib de easiest squashed thing in de whole human body? An' when you goes to de market an' wants to git de tenderest roast don't you buy de rib roast?

"Yassum, dat's de trouble wid women down to dis very day. Dey ain't got no backbone. Of a rib dey was made, an' a rib dey has stayed, an' nobody ain't got no right to expect nothin' else from 'em. Hit's becaze woman was made out of man's rib—an' from de way she acts hit looks lak she was made out of a floatin' rib at dat—an' man was left wid all of his backbone, dat he's got de comeupance over woman. An' dat's de reason dat we women sets down an' cries when we ought to git up an' heave brick-bats.

"Yassum, most of women's troubles in dis worl' come of dere not havin' no backbone, an' I don't know nothin' dat makes you want to cry out of one side of yo' mouf an' laugh out of de odder mo' dan is de fact dat most of de women

in de worl' is down on dere knees prayin' for miracles to happen dat dey could make happen dereselfs ef dey'd git up on dere hindlegs an' make jest one good fight for 'em. I ain't a sayin' nothin' aginst dem Anti societies. I 'spect dey does lots of good, but I done took notice dat dem reforms reform most and quickest what you goes after wid a axe when yo' dander is up.

"I know how dat is myself. When me an' Ike fust got married, after he got tired of holdin' my hand, he begun to segasuate off de straight an' narrow path, away from home, an' back to de crap game, an' de corner saloon. Cose dis makes a mighty talk, an' some of de sisters in Iseral comes to me an' axes, 'Did I want de prayers of de chu'ch for him,' an' I says, not ontil after my right arm gave out. So dat night when Ike got home, he found his lovin' wife awaitin' up for him wid de rollin' pin in one hand, an' de stove lifter in de odder, an' by de time he got out of de horspital hit looked lak he kinder lost his interest in wanderin' away from his own fireside. Leastways when he sort of looks wishful towards de do' of a night, an' he catches my eye he says he believes he feels too tired to go out, anyway.

"Yassum, dey talks 'bout de difference between men an' women, but de biggest difference is in dis matter of de backbone, an' hit's what keeps women good, an' gives men de right to be bad, for dere ain't no foolishness dat a man will stand from a woman, an' dere ain't no foolishness dat a woman won't stand from a man.

"Jest look at Sis Susana, what loves a dram as well as de next one, but what catches up her skirts an' fairly flies by de fambly entrance to de saloon, for she knows dat ef she was to come home drunk Brer Eben would fling her clothes out of de do', an' tell her to git out an' git. But what does Sis Susana do when Brer Eben comes home dat tanked up wid Red Eye dat hit takes two brother lodge members to fetch him home? She does jest lak a million odder spineless wives. She gits up an' opens de do' for him wid a sad, sweet smile, an' she spends de night a puttin' ice cloths on his fevered brow, an' makin' him hot coffee an' cookin' him somethin' dat he thinks he can eat.

"When de Prodigal Son comes back you can always count on some woman runnin' out an' slayin' de fatted calf, but when de Prodigal Daughter shows up at home you don't hear of

no man even so much as passin' her out a veal cutlet.

"An' dere's Sis Alviry whose husband run off wid a yallow gal wid a straight front figger, an' a three story pompadour, an' jay bird heeled shoes. What does Sis Alviry do when dat onery, low flung nigger come back home agin an' settled down on her to support him? Did she sick de dogs on him lak he would a done on her ef she'd run off an' come back? Nawm. Instead of moanin' an' groanin' becaze she's got one mo' to feed, she go out an' buy a dinner wid chicken fixin's an' invites in her friends to celebrate, becaze dat loafer has done come back to her.

"An' dere's Sis Henrietta what's raisin' up a passel of chillen for de chain gang becaze she ain't got de backbone to stand up an' fight 'em, an' what sets in my parlor chair, a sheddin' tears all over de flo' becaze she says dat she can't reach dere higher natures.

" 'Sis Henrietta,' says I, 'has you ever tried reachin' for dere finer feelin's wid a bed slat or a stick of stove wood? Dat's de way I found mine, an' I done raise up a fambly dat does me proud,' but Sis Henrietta is jest a mush poltice, an' all dat she can do is to sit down an' cry.

"An' whats de reason dat we women can't vote, an ain't got no say so 'bout makin' de laws dat bosses us? Ain't we got de right on our side? Yassir, we'se got de right on our side, but we ain't got de backbone in us to jest retch out an' grab dat ballot.

"Dere ain't nobody sputin' de fact dat we'se got to scrape up de money to pay de tax collector, even ef we does have to go down into a skirt pocket insted of pants pocket, to git hit, an' our belongin' to de angel sect ain't gwine to keep us out of de jail ef we gits in a fight wid anodder lady, or we swipes a ruffled petticoat off de clothes line next do'.

"Furdermo' when de meat trust puts up de price of po'k chops hit's de women dat has got to squeeze de eagle on de dollar until hit hollers a little louder. Hit's women dat has got to patch dere husband's britches, an' turn dere old dresses one times mo', if de tariff puts up de price of clothes. Hit's women dat has got to send dere sons out to fight ef a war comes on de country. Hit's women dat has got to see dere babies sicken an' die ef de milk is watered an' de streets ain't clean. Hit's women dat has got to send dere little chillen into factories to wuk at what ought to be de play time of life, if times

gits harder, an' so we women is des a achin' to have a finger in dat government pie an' see if we can't put a little mo' sweetenin' in hit, an' make hit a little lighter so dat hit won't set so heavy an' ondigestable on de stomachs of dem what ain't millionaires.

"Yassir, we'se jest a hoanin' for de franchise, an' we might have had hit any time dese last forty years ef we had enough backbone to riz up an' fight one good fight for hit, but insted of dat we set around a holdin' our hands, an' all we'se done is to say in a meek voice, 'Please sir, I don't lak to trouble you, but ef you'd kindly pass me de ballot hit sho'ly would be agreeable to me.'

"An' insted of givin' hit to us men has kinder winked one eye at each odder an' said, 'Lawd, she don't want hit, or else she'd make a fuss about hit. Dats de way we did. We didn't go after de right to vote wid our pink tea manners on. Cose we'se got to give hit to her some time but we won't hand her out her sheer of de estate ontil she gits hay on her horns an' to rowin' about hit.'

"Yassir, dats de true word an' you listen to me—de day dat women spunks up, an' rolls up dere sleeves, an' says to dere husbands dat dere

ain't gwine to be no mo' cookin' in dis house, nor darnin' of socks, nor patchin' of britches, ontel dere is some female votin' doin, why, dat day de ballot will be fetched home to women on a silver salver. All dat stands between woman an' suffrage is de lack of a spinal column.

"Yassum, most of de troubles in dis worl' dat women has come along of dere bein' born wid a wish bone insted of a backbone, but I lay dey can't help it. Hit's all de fault of de way dey was made, but what I'd lak to know is, why women didn't get a show at Adam's backbone insted of his chist protector?"

XXIV

Matrimony

“**B**RER JENKINS, what is my preacher, you know, axed me a mighty funny question last night. He axed me ef, in my opinion, marriage was a failure.

“ ‘Dat depends,’ I ’sponds, ‘upon what you marry for. Ef you married becaze you thunk dat matrimony is a kind of transh of bliss where you is never gwine to be hongry no mo’, an’ nothin’ is gwine to rile you, an’ all you got to do is jest to set up an’ have somebody hold yo’ hand, an’ tell you how good lookin’ an’ peart you is—ef dat is what you specs you is gittin’ when you ties up in double harness wid somebody, den marriage is shorely a failure.

“ ‘But ef you marries as a means of grace, an’ becaze you is got a proud an’ haughty spirit dat needs, as de Good Book says, to be humble an’ broke to save you from de wrath to come, den marriage is de biggest sort of a success. Becaize dere ain’t nothin’ dat fits you for de odder world lak wrastlin’ wid matrimony in dis.’

"Yassum; I'se been married to Ike nigh on to thuty years, an' purgatory ain't got no terrors for me. I'se had dat hot a time in de holy estate dat I specs dat even ef I went to de Bad Place I'd say to de little imps, 'Would you mind chuckin' up de fire a little? I feels sort of chilly, not bein' acclimated yit to dis frosty climate.'

"Yassum; dat's whut maternony is. Hit's a preparation for de troubles to come. Yassum, hit certainly is.

"Tain't dat I'se opposed to marriage. Naw'm. Far from hit. I'se in favor of hit. It's good for folks. Hit's lak dese heah bitter doses dat de doctors give people in de Spring of de year dat's mighty hard to swallow, and mighty apt to turn yo' stomach whilst you is tryin' to git hit down, but dat makes you feel mighty good an' as spry an' gay as a two-year-old when hit's over.

"Dat's de reason dat widders an' widdowers is de smilingest an' de liveliest people dat you ever meets up wid. An' dey's de amiablest an' de friendliest, too. De ole maids an' de bachelors, dey's most generally sour an' cranky, an' de married folks dey's cross an' grouchy, but de widders an' de widdowers dey's jest as kind an' purty as a basket of kittens. An' de reason of

dat is dis—dey is done gone an' been an' took dere dose of matrimony, an' hit's kinder wuked all de meanness out of dere systems an' left 'em feelin' good toward ev'rybody. Specially as dey is done got through wid hit, an' got de taste out of dere mouths.

"Co'se ef enybody is prognosticatin' dat matrimony is a glory ticket to heaven on dis yearth, dey better not fool wid hit. Caze you's gwine to find out dat you don't know how many faults po', frail human nature has got, an' dat you is got de whole bunch of 'em, ontill you gits married an' has de partner of yo' bosom call yo' attention to yo' defects. Notherwise does you find out dat trials an' tribulations comes to de married by de peck instead of by de pinch, as dey does to de single, ontill you has done tied dat knot wid yo' tongue dat you can't ontie wid yo' teeth.

"Natchally folks ain't prepared for de rough side of matrimony, becuze dere wouldn't be any matrimony ef dey was, an' so ev'y sassy young gal an' good lookin' young buck goes along lookin' for ev'ythin' to be mighty rosy, an' dey dreams about love in a cottage widout ever castin' a thought toward twins an' de colic, an' de rent collector.

"Den de man begin to find out dat he has to do extra jobs after wuk hours to keep meat in de pot, an' fudderemo' dat he is dat scared of de lovely, angelic creeter dat he is married to dat he takes off his shoes and climbs in de winder lak he was robbin' a hen roost when he comes home late at night.

"An' de woman finds out dat whut she has got out of matermony is de chanst. to wuk ten times harder dan she ever did befo', an' de privilege of turnin' over de money dat she made takin' in washin' to a man what passes hit over de counter for red-eye whisky dat makes him come home an' beat her, an' both of 'em figgers hit out dat marriage is a failure, an' nobody ain't got no call to throw no fits of surprise at hit.

"De funny part of hit is, dough, dat nobody don't take no warnin' from 'em. Yet you can tell a married pusson an' a single pusson apart des as far as you can lay yo' eyeballs on 'em. Dey's jest lak dese heah 'befo' 'an' 'after' takin' picters. De ones what is married is po', an' seedy lookin', an' wid a chastened look, whilst dem what is single is spry, an' all dressed up an' looks lak dey owned de yearth.

"Yassum, marriage shorely does tak de vanity an' de spirit out of folks, but hit comes back

when dey gits single agin. De very fust thing dat a widder or a widderer does after de funeral is over an' de mourners gone home is to go out an' buy 'em some good clothes.

"Howsomever, I'se one of dose dat believes what de Good Book says about marriage bein' a special providence for bringin' down de proud spirited, for de Lawd only knows whar we'd be if ev'rybody was single, and dere warn't nobody to tell us how to raise our chillen.

"Caze hit's de ole maids and de ole bachelors, what ain't got no troubles of dere own, what's got de time an' de probusiness to run de universe.

"Yassum, a woman what's got a house full of chillen to nuss, an' dress, an' cook an' wash for, lak I is, an' a husband dat she's got to keep her eye on to head him off from sashayin' around wid a lakly young woman wid a straight front figger, an' a peach basket hat, lak Ma'y Jane Jones, ain't got no time to worry about de suppression of polygmy 'mongst the Sulus, nor whedder de Hottentots is got flannel petticoats or not.

"An' a man what can't manage one po' little measly woman dat he's married to, an' who is dat henpecked dat he always says 'Our pants,' when he talks about his britches, ain't so all-fired

sho' dat he could run de country better dan dem what is doin' hit, so he jest sort of lets de President rock along de best he can widout his advice.

"Yassum, all de reformers dat ever I seed was ole maids or ole bachelors, or else dey married late in life, after dey got de reformin' habit, an' couldn't break dereselves of hit, but I done took notice dat de most rambustious reformers after dey tackles maternony simmers down mighty an' ain't nigh so certain dat dey knows hit all.

"Yassum, hit is kinder curious why folks marries when most of us don't see much to envy in de husbands an' wives around us. I lay dey's sort of lak me. When I told my Aunt Hannah dat I was gwine to git spliced to Ike she up an' warned me against de deceitfulness of maternony.

"But you got married,' I says.

"Yes,' says she, 'an' I seed de folly of hit.'

"Well,' I spons, 'I wants to see de folly of hit, too.'

"An' dat's how come de Marriage License Bureau is still doin' business at de ole stand."

XXV

The Higher Education

“**M**Y gal, Ma’y Jane, done got home from de cemetery,” announced Mirandy with bursting pride.

“Seminary,” I corrected.

“Des call it whutever you lak,” she responded amiably. “Anyway, Ma’y Jane done got home, an’ she’s jist plumb ruint. Shes dat full of bombosity and pomposity, an’ supecilliosity dat dere ain’t no livin’ in de house wid her, an’ when she talks you’d think the dictionary done bust loose, an’ done scattered words all over de place. Hit’s jest scandalous de lot of language she uses.

“Yassum, she’s jist plumb ruint. She ain’t been home two hours befo’ she done tied blue bows on de table legs, an’ combed de chillens hair pompadour, an’ let her pa an’ ma know dat we is got to go away back, an’ set down, caze she is Miss Wisdom from Know-all-ville, an’ furdermore she done tole us she was gwine to

be a cricket on de hearth—an' I done always hate an' despise dem measly little black bugs, an' squashes 'em ev'time I gets de chanst.

"Yassum, it sholy am tryin', an' wearin' on de constitution to have a edicated chile. Hit's suttinly am.

"But I ain't surprised at what happened. I knowed how hit was gwine to turn out all de time, an' I done tole my ole man, Ike—dat's her pa—jest how 'twas gwine to be. But he is des so sot on dat gal he was jest bleeged to send her off to school. An' now she's come home des plumb ruint. She walks aroun' wid her nose in de air, a sightin' at de telefoam posts, an' pint-edly overlooks her ole mammy a bendin' over de washtub. Hit sholy does rile me, for all de time dat gal was away I was wukkin', an' inchin', an' pinchin', an' scrinchin' to pay for her edication, an' I'se been a layin out to take a rest, an' kind of let up on things when she come home. But bless yo' heart, she up an' tell me dat she ain't got no notion of cookin' and washin'.

"I got de higher culcher,' she says, givin' her head a toss in de air.

"De Lawd sakes, has you,' says I, grabbin' up de baby an' reachin' down de camphor bottle, case dat chile ain't been vaccinated. 'Why



The Sweet Girl Graduate.

didn't you tell me befo' you was 'flicted,' I says.
'Whar did you git hit? Is it ketchin?'

"But if you believe me, dat culcher ain't no misery. Hit's jest somethin' dey gits in de school. Well, I let hit go at dat, an' things dest run long till Sunday, me a-performin' on de washboard, an' Ma'y Jane a performin' on de melojum. Den she up an' says she ain't gwine to chu'ch. Dat she don't believe in de Bible, nor nothin', an' dat she outgrewed all dat in de cemetery. She sholy did spressify herself mos' ongordly. I knowed hit was gwine to make a scandal in de neighborhood an' me de president of de Daughters of Zion, what sets in de front pew at de funerals, an' rides wid de mo'ners. Comin' on back from ch'uch dat day, here comes dat biggity Mandy Jones.

" 'Sis Mirandy,' she says, 'I done hear dat Ma'y Jane done backslided, an' fell from grace.'

" 'Dey ain't nothin' de matter wid Ma'y Jane,' I spons, "'ceptin she's got de culchar up dar at dat school.'

" 'De lan's sakes,' sclaims Mandy. 'De hand of de Lawd suttingly is laid heavy on you, Sis Mirandy, but you better poultice hit befo' hit gits enny wus. I don't specs hit is enny more dan skin deep now.'

"I lay I kin tend to Ma'y Jane, Sis Mandy,
I spons, an' she went on her way.

"Dat was yistidy. Dis mawnin' I call Ma'y
Jane in de shedroom, an' I reach down a ole
trunk strop, an' you better believe I knocked all
de higher culchar outen dat nigger in about fo'
minutes.

"Does yer believe in de Bible now?" I axed
her, when I stopped to ketch my bref.

"Yassum," she says.

"Yer believes hit from led to led?" I says,
an' I give dat strop anodder swing.

"Dat I does, bless Gord," she says.

"An' yer ain't got no doubt 'bout Jonah swal-
lowin' dat whale?" I axed her again.

"Nawm, dat I ain't," she says, an' I let her
go.

"When I left home she was wringing out de
clothes, 'an a singin' so you could hear her roun'
de block:

"Methodist, Methodist is my name,
I hopes to live an' die de same."

"An' I knowed I done downed de culchar, an'
nipped de onbelief in de bud.

"Nawm, I ain't spectin' to have no mo' trou-
ble 'bout Ma'y Jane's religion. Des give dis

ole niggar a good trunk strop, 'an elbow room,
an' she can convert mo sinners in a minnit dan
de Salvation Armyers can in a week. You hear
me?"

XXVI

The Price of Fame

“PLEASEUM, has you got ‘bout a dollar an’ fo’ bits layin’ ’roun de house handy dat you could advance me on nex’ week’s washin’?

“I sholy don’t know nothin’ dat makes you so tired as to have to wuk for money dat you has done gone an’ spent befo’ you gits hit. Hit’s lak buyin’ things on de installment plan, which gives you mo’ wa’r an’ ta’r on yo’ constitution dan anything else in dis world. Yassum, hit sholy does frazzle you out, an’ I ain’t never got over dat case whut I got when me an’ Ike bought dat melojium. Leastways Ike, he bought de melojium, an’ I took in washin’ an’ paid for hit.

“What, ain’t I never tol’ you ‘bout dat melojium? Honey, nobody don’t know how fast time can scoot ontel dey buys somethin’ on de installment plan. Hit jest looks lak one pay day laps over anodder, lak de shingles on de roof. Fust an’ last I bet I’se done paid out mo’ dan fo’ million dollars for dat melojium.

"You see, hit happen lak dis: One day I was a settin' down in my do', jest as ca'm an' saterfied as a cat in de sun, an' not lookin' for trouble nowhar, when up drives a wagon wid somethin' in hit dat looked lak a cross betwixt a bureau an' a piany.

"I wants to sell you a melojium," de man says.

"Whut in de name of Goodness do I want wid a melojium?" I spons.

"You can perform upon dis for de pleasure of yo' fambly," says he.

"I 'low dat de skillet an' de cook stove is de only instruments dis ole nigger can perform on," I says, "but I'se got a master han' wid de pots an' de pans, an' de music dat I makes on dem hits my fambly whar dey lives."

"But dest den Ike up an' took a han' in de conversation, an' I knowed dat trouble was headin' my way, becaze I done had thuty yeahs of experience wid Ike in de holy bonds of maternony, an' I knowed dat he was one of dese heah kind of folks dat will buy anythin' dat dey don't have to plank down de cash money for. Yassum, you could sell Ike a fur overcoat to wear in Hell, ef you'd give him till nex' Christmas to pay for hit.

"So I says, 'Ike don't you be fool enough to buy dat contrapshun,' but when hit comes to foolishness, Ike's mighty gifted, an' de long an' de sho't of dat was dat dat man unloaded dat mellojum in our parlor, an' I'se been a-wukin' ever sence to pay for hit, becaze I ain't goin' to let dat biggity Ma'y Jane Jones say dat I can't suppo't one po', measly, wheezy mellojum. Nawm, dat I ain't, ef I has to wuk my fingers to de bone to do hit.

"But hit sho' does come hard to be a sacerficiin' for a thing dat you ain't got no manner of use for, an' dat makes you feel lak bustin' hit open ev'ytime you pass hit by. An' dat's de probusness of buyin' things on de instalment plan, an' of spendin' money befo' you gits hit earned, an' ef dere was jest me in my fambly, dere wouldn't be no sech doing.

"Yessum, ef my husband an' chillen was jest plain, ordinary sort of folks lak I is dere wouldn't be no trouble in our keepin' out of debt, but what wid de Sons of Zion presentin' Ike wid a lovin'-cup, an' Thomas Jefferson Abra'm Lincoln bein' elected de captain of be Black an' Tan Baseball Club, an' May Jane bein' app'nted de Queen of Sheba at de Sunday-school blow-



"May Jane got elected to be de Queen of Sheba."

out, hit's made de fambly puss look lak an elephant is done trod on hit.

"Yessum, we-all is gittin' famous at our house, an' fame sut'nly do come high. I used to wonder why all dem folks what has got dere statutes an' pictures up in de parks an' public places is so peaked lookin', for dey sho' has got a mighty lean an' hongry look. But now I knows. Dey had to spend so much money on dere halos dat dey didn't have no change left to buy corned beef an' cabbage wid.

"Yessum, hit sut'nly am expensive to be distinctive, an' ef dere hadn't been one po' humble woman in our fam'ly widout no talents, dat kep' de pot a-b'ilin', I s'pec's dat I could name de name of two favorite sons an' a daughter dat was mighty puffed up wid pride, but dat wouldn't 'a' had nothin' else to stay dere stomachs on but compliments. An' compliments is lak dried apples—dey's sweet an' tasty, an' dey swells you all up, but dey is all wind. Dey don't stand by you lak pork-chops.

"Hit used to seem mighty funny to me dat dere gen'rally wa'n't but one gifted member in a fambly, but, my land, I guess de good Lawd knows what he's about. Hit makes all de balance of de fam'ly git up an' hustle to support one

genius. Yessum, de reason dat I has to do about so is becaze I's got a husband an' two chillen dat's a-sproutin' laurel wreaths on dere brows, an' you can't expect dem to knuckle down to hard wuk an' savin' lak common folkses. Dey's got to live up to dere reputation, an' I done found out dat hit costs mo' to support a reputation dan hit does to take keer of a pair of twins.

"Now dere's Ike. Ike is de most popularest man in de chu'ch an' de union, an' whenever anybody comes along an' starts up a new society, hit's foreordained an' predestinated, as Br'er Jenkins would say, dat Ike is gwine to be elected wid a risin' vote to be de president, or de secretary, or de chairman of de finance committee, or somethin' or anodder dat's got a fo'teen hours day's wuk in hit, an' no pay.

"Co'se hit seems mighty grand to be dat prominent, an' ev'ry time dey saddles him wid a new honor, an' mo' wuk, Ike comes home wid his chest stickin' out so far dat hit done busts off his shirt-buttons, an' I goes out de nex' mornin' an' hunts up mo' washin', becaze I knows dat we's gwine to need mo' money in our house. Beacaze I's done cut my wisdom teeth, an' I knows dat de mo' famous a man is de less money an' de less time he's got for his fambly. He's got to

live up to dat badge wid de gold-fringed ends
dat dey pins on his coat, an' you could buy a
house an' lot an' a diamond pin wid what dat
snippy little piece of cotton-backed ribbon cost.

"Yessum, dere used to be some interest, in de
days when Ike was unknown, in lookin' forward
to Saturday night when he got his pay-envelope,
but now by de time he gits through headin' de
contribution list becaze he is de treasurer, an'
losin' a day's wuk becaze bein' de president of
de organization he has to attend all de funerals
an' ride wid de mourners when a member dies,
dere ain't enough left to make hit worth de trou-
ble to go through his pockets after he goes to
sleep.

"Naw'm dere ain't no money in bein' dis-
tinctious, but dere is lots of glory, an' glory
comes high, an' dat's how come I's borrowin' of
you ontel I can kinder catch up wid de honors
dat has done been showered on de fambly.

"You see, hit was lak dis: De odder night
Ike comes home a-grinnin' from ear to ear, an'
he says to me as I was gittin' supper,

"Mirandy, hit am a proud day for you, an'
you ought to be a thankful woman dat you mar-
ried lak you did."

"Huh, ef anybody outmarried deyself in dis

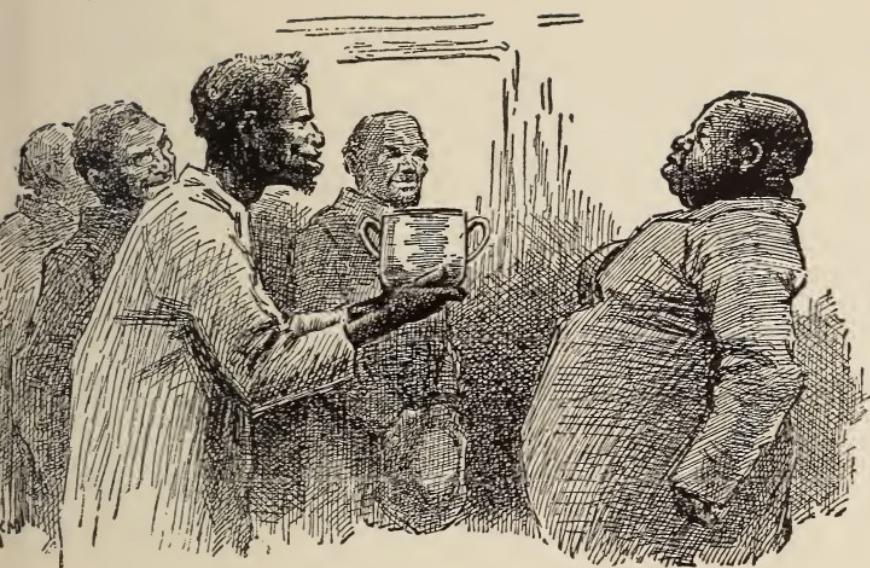
fambly, dat one don't answer to de forgiven name of Mirandy,' spons I, for hit don't do to let yo' husband know dat you thinks too well of him. Hit makes him dat upperty dat dere ain't no livin' in peace wid him. 'But what's de matter now? What luck is come yo' way? Is dey made you de foreman at de shop or give you more wages?' I axes.

"'Heish, woman,' he says, 'wid yo' mind always set on dem grovelin' p'ints. No. A real honor has been bestowed upon me, an' one dat touches my heart. De Sons of Zion is a-gwine to present me wid a lovin'-cup as a slight testimonial of dere esteem an' of de noble an' conscientious way in which I has done my duty as de Keeper of de Seals an' Records.'

"'Humph,' says I, 'dey gives you de cup, but I lay we's got to fill hit.'

"'Of co'se,' spons Ike, in a high an' mighty manner; 'we can do no less to show our appreciation of de honor dat has done been did me.'

"Well, dat night a committee of de brederen come roun' to present de lovin'-cup to Ike, an' when de speecherfyin' was over we sent Thomas Jefferson Abra'm Lincoln, which is our oldest son, up to de corner saloon to git enough beer to



*"A committee of de brederen come roun' to pre-
sent de lovin'-cup to Ike."*

fill hit so dat dey could drink to eternal love an' friendship.

"Den de balance of de lodge sauntered roun' to see de cup dat dey done suscribed for, an' dat dey felt like dey done paid for de right to drink out of, an' we chased Thomas Jefferson Abra'm Lincoln back to de saloon for mo' beer. Den de neighbors heared dat Ike was gittin' a tribute, an' dey begun to drop in to offer dere congratulations, an' after dat Thomas Jefferson Abra'm Lincoln kep' de path hot weavin' betwixt our house an' de saloon, tryin' to keep dat cup full.

"Yessum, befo' dat night was over dat tin-plated mug dat you could have bought in a department sto' for ninety-eight cents done cost us mo' dan nine dollars in beer, let alone de accidents to de furniture dat took place after de lovin'-cup had been aroun' about ten times an' two of de brederen got mixed up in a little dispute about whedder Ike was a greater man dan ole Gineral Grant.

"Den befo' we got Ike's glory all paid up at de saloon, Thomas Jefferson Abra'm Lincoln got unanimously appointed to be de captain of de Black an' Tan Baseball Club, an' I had to take de money dat I done saved up to buy me some flannel shirts to git up a chicken dinner wid

fixin's for de club as a slight recognition of de compliment dat dey done paid him, an' dat busts us ag'in.

"Den May Jane, she got elected to be de Queen of Sheba, an' we had to strain our credit at de grocery-sto' a-entertainin' de choir what name her for de place, to say nothin' about buyin' her a white frock wid spangles on hit to wear when she led de procession, an' dat had to be fine enough to make all de odder gals green wid envy, or else dere wouldn't be no good in bein' de queen. An' dat's de reason, hit's along wid havin' all of dis glory kinder thrust on de fambly all at once, dat I has to borrow an' is why dat I'd be much obligeed to you ef you could strain a p'int an' let me have de wash money in advance, please 'um.

"Yessum, glory sut'nly does come high. Hit looks lak to me dat fame is somethin' dat you spends yo' life a-wukin for, an' den hit lands you in de po'house."

XXVII

The Advantages of Invalidism

“DE ODDER night,” said Mirandy, “Sis Calline, whut is one of dese heah women whut enjoys po’ health, comes to my house, an’ after we had passed de time of day wid each odder, she folds her hands, an’ fetchs a groan from de pit of her stomach.

“Den I knowed dat de time had done come when I’se got to inquire ‘bout how she is feelin’, an’ de forty ’leven different kinds of misery dat she’s wrastlin’ wid, for ef you wants to make her pass a pleasant hour, all you’ve got to do is to jest set still, an’ let her meander an’ peruse along ‘bout her sufferings.

“Well, Sis Calline,’ says I, ‘how does you prognosticate yo’ symptoms dis mawnin’?’

“‘Sis Mirandy,’ spons Sis Calline, ‘I ain’t a wishin’ to brag on myself, but I sho’ must be a favorite wid de Lawd, for you know what de Good Books say—dat He afflicts dem whut He loves, an’ I’se dat full of afflictions dat ef Job

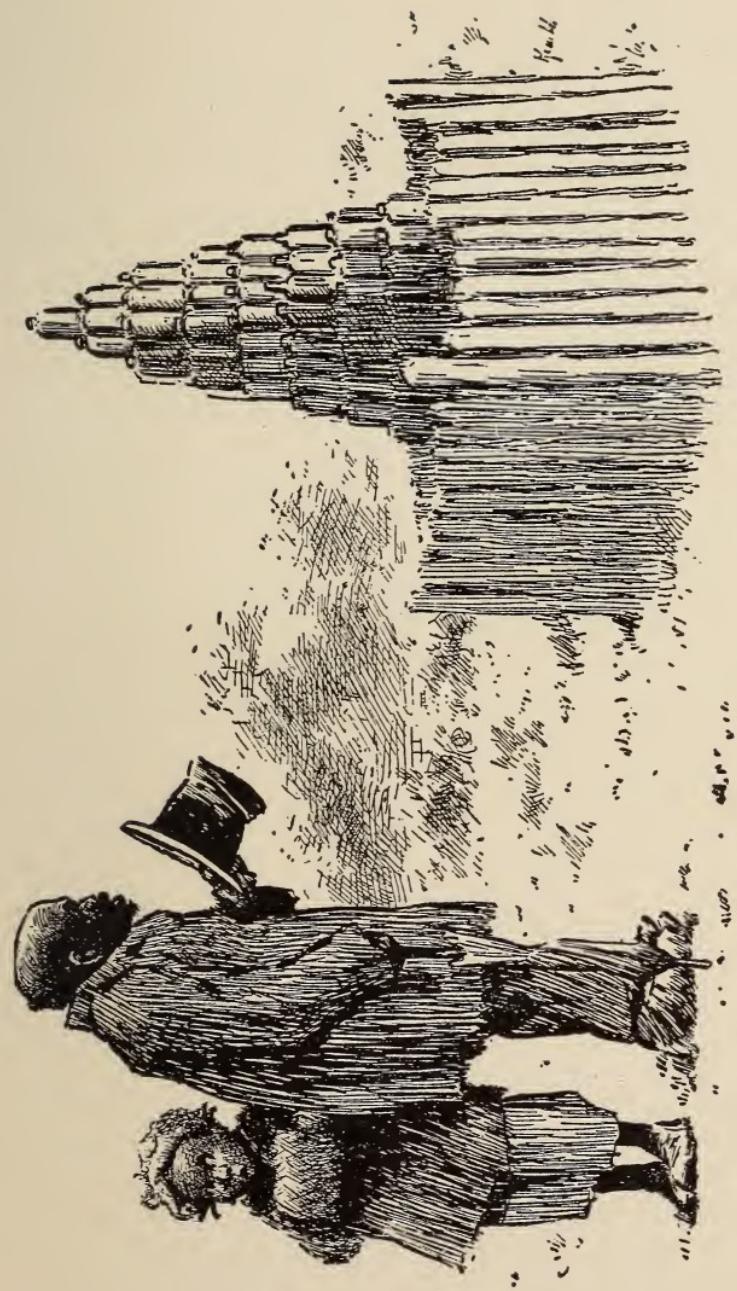
was heah, nobody wouldn't tucken no notice of him, an' he'd never git his name printed in a book at all, let 'lone one written about his sufferens an' biles. Nawm, Sis Mirandy ma'am, ef it wasn't dat I had a strong constitution, I couldn't stand all dem deadly diseases whut I has got.'

"'Whut does de doctor call yo' complaint?' inquires I.

"'He says dat I'se got dis heah disease whut dey calls de chronics,' she spons, a puffin' out her chest wid vainglory.

"'My lan','' sclaims I, 'dat's awful, but you always was a up-an'-comin' woman, Sis Calline, but at any rate you ought to be thankful dat you ain't got dis new fangled ailment dat dey calls de nervous prosperity, becaze folks dat has dat don't never git over hit. Nor yit do dey die, dough all of de folks aroun' em would be mighty reconciled ef de good Lawd should see fittin' to take 'em.'

"'Huh,' spons Sis Calline, wid a discontemptuous snort, for sick folks ain't never got no opinion of de things dat ails odder folks, 'dat nervous prosperity used to be so dat nobody but de rich folks ever had it, but hit's got so common now dat anybody can ketch it. Hit ain't lak



"A pile of bottles dat will be a monyment to my memory."

de chronics, which hit takes a pusson wid a real gift for sickness to have.

" 'Why, Sis Mirandy,' goes on Sis Calline wid a beamin' smile, 'I'se tucken mo' dan a carload of patent medicine, an' I bet dat ef all de pills I has swallowed was put up in a pile, dat dey would look lak a mountain, an' as for doctors, Sis Mirandy, I has been de dispensation of Province dat has made ev'y one of 'em in de community able to set up a autymobile.'

" 'You suttinly has been a grand perseverin' invalid, an' done yo' duty noble in dat line,' spons I.

" 'Hit ain't for me to brag on myself an' my sufferins, dough as a doser, an' one dat lays a heavy hand on de medicine bottle, I's got a record dat I can pint to wid pride,' says Sis Calline, 'an' when I dies I will leave behind me a pile of bottles dat will be a monymont to my memory. Howsumever, Sis Mirandy,' she goes on, 'up to dis time I'se jest been plain sickly, which ain't got no particler interest in hit, 'ceptin' to de one whut's got hit an' deir fambly; but now de doctor prognosticates as how I is got dis high fallutin' trouble whut all de millionaires have, dat dey call de appendiceitful, an' dat I'll have to go to de horspital an' have hit carved out.'

" 'Bless God for all his mercy,' sclaims I, 'but, Sis Calline, you sholy is de lucky woman!'

" 'How's dat, Sis Mirandy?' axes she.

" 'Why,' spons I, 'hit'll set you up in conversation for de balance of your life, for I never did know anybody whut had had an' operation dat ever talked about anythin' else as long as dey lived.

" 'Yes, Sis Calline,' I continues, 'you won't never have to search around in yo' mind for a nice, interestin', cheerful subject to discourse on. All you got to do is jest to begin to reel off de particlers of dat time you was operated on, an' whut de doctors said, an' whut de nuss said, an' whut dey done in de horspital, an' dere you are! An' folks is got to listen to you becaze most of 'em has been dere, an' dey is jest waitin' for you to stop to catch your breath, so dey can tell about deir operation.

" 'Dat's whut makes me say dat you is de lucky woman, becaze when you comes out of de horspital you'll be able to hold your own in sassiety wid de odders whut's been operated on, an' ef you don't git out of de horspital hit sholy would reconcile you to death dat you wouldn't have to listen about odder people's operations, anyhow.'

" 'I tell you, Sis Calline, dat I'se thought dat I would have to withdraw from de Sewing S'ciety, an' de Female Prayer Meetin', an' de Mothers in Israel, an' de Daughters of Zion, through not never havin' had no operation, an' darfore, not bein' able to hold up my end in conversation!'

" 'Oh, Sis Mirandy,' says Sis Calline, 'as de Good Book says, we are fearfully and wonderfully made.'

" 'Dat's right,' spons I, 'an' I reckon dat de Creator must turn out a mighty fust-class job when He makes us, or else we couldn't stand all de tinkerin' dat de doctors does on us.'

"But wid dat Sis Calline said dat she must be on her way, as she was dest makin' a few farewell visits befo' she goes to de horspital, an' I speeds her on her way, for ef dere is one thing dat raises my dander mo' dan anodder hit is dese heah women whut is got de strength to stand thuty or forty years of bein' sick, but ain't got de strength to cook a meal's vittels, or do a day's washin', or sweep a floor.

"Yassum, hit takes a able-bodied woman to stand all de medicine dey takes, an' de projickin wid deir system dat dem invalid ladies does, an' if dey would put half de wuk on gittin' up an'

keepin' deir home clean an' tendin' to deir husbands and chilluns dat dey does in nussin' deir pains, an' complainin' of deir miseries, dey would be well. Course, I ain't denyin' dat dere is lots of sick women, but I done took notice dat dem dat is got real pains an' aches dies, an' dat's whut makes me have my spicions of dem wives whut can go on bein' sick, year after year, widout givin' deir po', 'flicted husbands de reward of payin' all dem doctor's bills, by makin' 'em widowers.

"Yassum, I specs dat bein' a invalid is about de best job dat anybody can grabble, for hit lets you in for doin' all dat you wants to do, an' lets you out of doin' all de things dat you don't want to do. All dat you got to do is to call yo' temper nerves, an' you can say whut you likes to folks, an' instid of battin' you over de head lak you deserves, dey has got to sympathize wid you an' take hit becaze you say you're sick.

"An' ef you'se too lazy to wuk, all you got to do is to always be a-moanin' an' a-groanin' about your aches an' pains an' somebody else will roll up deir sleeves an' support you, an' you gits de breast of de chicken, an' de heart of de po'k chops, instid of bein't kicked out of de do' lak you oughter be.

"An' you gits de best bed, an' de easiest chair, an' nobody don't dast 'spite you, no matter whut you says, an' you takes de money to buy medicine dat ought to go for bread and meat fo' de fambly, an' all you do is des to set on de invalid throne, an' hold up people, an' make 'em listen whilst you discourses about your symptems. Ef dat ain't a cinch, den dis ole nigger don't know one, an' I only wishes dat I had had enough sense forty years ago to qualify in de ranks of dem whut is invalids, instid of learnin' to be a number one wash'woman.

"But bein' as how I'se been one of de wukkers instid of one of de complainers I just wants to spressify de opinion dat dem ladies whut is too feeble an' weak to take care of deir chillun, but has got de strength to attend de bargain sales, an' play cyards fo' hours at a stretch, will have to figger in a funeral befo' I sheds any tears over deir bad health.

"Yassum, hit sholy must be a mighty comfortable thing to be a invalid. An' it gives you a lot to talk about."

XXVIII

Creeds

“**B**R’ER JENKINS was at my home last night,” observed Mirandy, “an’ he was expostulatin’ ‘bout dat new sect of religioners out in de West, whar’ de man say he is Adam, an’ de woman say she is Eve, an’ dey is tryin’ to start a sort of second-hand Eden whar dey ‘lows dere wont be no sin, an’ ev’body will go about widout no clothes on unless dey maybe mought be sort of dressy, an’ wear a fig leaf or so.

“ ‘Humph,’ ’sp ons I, ‘I don’t think much of dat as a faith, leastways for women. Dere wouldn’t be no Eden ef hit didn’t have a few bonnits, an’ longery shirt waists in hit, for no female lady dat I is acquainted with. Besides even a angel looks better wid a nice floatin’ robe on, an’ dere ain’t nothin’ in de spectacle of a bony, scrawny woman, nor a fat, floppy one to elevate de thoughts towards speritual things. No, Br’er Jenkins,’ says I, ‘clothes is lak de mantle of charity—dey covers a multitude of sins, an’

you wont never ketch me runnin' off after any new-fangled religion dat does away wid yo' Sunday go-to-meetin' frock an' hat.'

" 'Bless Gord for de faithful!' spons Br'er Jenkins, 'but dese folks aint peeled down to de skin yit, owin' to not findin' enough folks dat is got a strangle hold on sin, an' furdermo' de climate am servigorous in dem parts in de Winter. But I hears dey is got a mighty lakely little valley whar dey is gwine back to de simple life of our first pa an' ma befo' dey got mixed up wid dat serpent business.'

"Yassum, dat's so. An' Br'er Jenkins' remarks remind me of Br'er Isham. Br'er Isham was a moughty peart man, what was a master bricklayer, an' when he move into our neighborhood dere was a mighty wrastlin' around to see what chu'ch he would jine, becaze we all felt dat he would be a powerful ornament to de congregation, bein' as how he was a pussonable man, wid a plug hat an' a bass voice dat shook de rafters when he open his mouf to sing.

"So all de sisters, dey go mighty perlite to call on Br'er Isham, an' invite him to deir chu'ch, an' he thank 'em, an' say he'll be pleased to drop around, but he don't say which faith is his faith, an' befo' we knowed hit de Methodist, an' de

Baptist, an' de Presbyterian, an' de Unitarian, an' de Piscumpalums sisters was all a claimin' him, an' havin' eyes on his pocketbook.

"At last I went to him, an' I says:

"'Br'er Isham,' says I, 'widout wishin' to pry into yo' private affairs, I makes bold to ax you what is de entitlement of de chu'ch dat you belongs to, for Sis Sally Ann says you is a Methodist an' is a countin' on you to contribute to deir strawberry supper, an' Sis Lucindy says you sho'ly will help out wid de missionary fund for de Presbyterians, you bein' one, an' strong in de faith, whilst Sis Malviry is a lookin' for you to open de raffle at de Unitarian bazaar, an' Sis Tempy is got you down for a cake for de Baptist supper, an' de Piscumpalum guild is waitin' for you wid fo'teen pairs of slippers dat dey is expectin' to sell to a gemman who is been brought up in de only religion dat is really styly. DAREFORE,' says I, 'hit will be money in yo' pocket to come out, an' say whar you belongs.'

"'Sis Mirandy,' 'sp ons B'r er Isham, 'dat is de true word you is givin' me, an' I thanks you for hit.'

"Wid dat Br'er Isham heave a sigh, an' den he went on. 'To tell you de truf, Sis Mirandy,' he 'sp ons, 'I hardly knows whar I stands, for I's

a religious man, Sis Mirandy, an' I'se sampled mos' all of de chu'ches, an' all of 'em had deir good pints an' deir bad pints.

" 'I was raised in de Catholic chu'ch, Sis Mirandy, an' hit suttinly is a grand ole chu'ch. An' deres somethin' in hit when de organ rolls, an' de candles shine on de altar, an de priest sings de mass dat makes a lump come in yo' throat, an' you feel lak you can almost stretch out yo' hand and tetch de robes of de holy ones; but, Sis Mirandy, de Catholic chu'ch is too sudden. Hit's too contemporaneous, so to speak. Hit don't put off de judgment day to de nex' world. Hit brings hit right along now, and whilst I didn't worry none 'bout runnin' up an account wid de Recording Angel, hit shorly did go against de grain to have to pay for my sins on de nail, des as I went along. Mo'over, I'se a hearty man wid a good appetite, an' dere was too many fast days to suit me, so I sorter moved on.

" 'Den I jined de Methodist chu'ch, Sis Mirandy, an' ef I dose say hit myself, I am mighty gifted as a shouter. Dat's a fine chu'ch, too, Sis Mirandy, but wid hit's 'sperience meetin' whar ev'body gits up an' tells about deir sins, hit ain't no place for a nigger whut is a jedge of fat pul-

lets, an' lives close to a place whar de chickens roost low. De Methodist chu'ch is a mighty good chu'ch for dem whut ain't been led into temptation, or is slick tongued, but hit didn't suit me, so I des sorter drew out, an' jined de Presbyterians.

" 'Dat sho'ly is a grand faith, Sis Mirandy, an' I took to predestination an' foreordination lak a duck to water, for hit suttinly is comfortin' to know dat what is to be is gwine to be, whedder hit is or not, an' dat you ain't really responsible for doin' de things dat hit was settled you was bound to do millions of years befo' you was bawn. Somehow, dough I got col' feet in de Presbyterian chu'ch a wonderin' ef, maybe, I'd drawd de wrong ticket, an' got de double cross in life; an' so, as nobody could tell me fur certain, which way I was headed, I hiked out for a chu'ch where de signboards was a little plainer.

" 'Den I jined de Piscumpalums, but dat is a book chu'ch, an' I didn't know how to read, an' hit kept me so mixed up dat I was always afeared I'd git de wrong blessin', fer lak as not when I'd want to 'zort de Lawd to send me a rain to bring up de potatoes, de only prar dat I could remember was for dem whut go down to de sea in ships, which didn't seem to have no bearin' on

de case. So I passed up de Piscumpalums, dough I sho'ly would lak to be saved in as good company as dey is. Dey suttinly would do you proud, when Gabriel blows his horn.

" 'De next chu'ch I tackled was de Unitarians. Dat's a big, fine, broad chu'ch, Sis Mirandy, but hit is cut too big for me. I lak to feel my religion fit a little closer, an' bind a little at de seams, not enough to really hamper me, you know, but just so I'll know I'se got hit on, so me an' dat chu'ch didn't stick togedder ve'y long, an' den I moved over to de Baptists.

" 'Dat's de chu'ch, Sis Mirandy! Dat's hit! Hit's dip an' duck, an' dere you are. Hit's de chu'ch wid de double action plan of salvation, for when you backslides all you got to do is to come agin'. And hit sets mo' store on doctrine dan hit does on wuks, which is mighty comfortin' to a man lak me whut draps by de way-side occasionally, yit is strong in de faith.

" 'Dat's whar I stands, Sis Mirandy. I'se a deep water Baptist, but I ain't a sayin' nothin' aginst all de odder chu'ches. Dey's all good, but you has to pick out yo' religion lak you does yo' coat—what'll suit one won't suit anodder, an' ev'rybody to deir taste.'

" 'Dat's so,' 'spons I, 'an' hit's a good thing we

don't all hold to de same faith, for ef we did dere wouldn't be nothin' to fight over.'

" 'Amen,' says Br'er Isham, 'an' hit's a better thing dere's so many different chu'ches—dey perlices each odder.' "

XXIX

Being Good

“**L**OOK at me!” exclaimed Mirandy, wrathfully; “look at me, for hit’s de las’ chanst you is gwine to have to see de Mirandy dat is a model wife an’ mother an’ sister an’ aunt an’ cousin an’ pillar of de chu’ch.

“Yassum, I done got my fill of doin’ my duty by ev’ybody, an’ insted of gittin’ praise an’ t’anks for what I done, havin’ folks set around an’ wonder why I didn’t do mo’. I’se got my dose, an’ I’se done stopped. I’se quituated, an’ ef you sees ole Mirandy a-passin’ around de hat any mo’ for de preacher, or takin’ off her flannel petticoat to wrap up de orphans, you write hit down in yo’ little book dat she’s done lost her min’. After dis hit’s me to grab de best of ev’ything for myself. I’se gwine to be a monster of selfishness, an’ dem whut don’t want to feel lak dey has been run over by a steam roller had better git out of my path. Dat’s all.

“Yassum, I’se had enough of bein’ good, an’

mo' dan enough. Dey ain't no pay in hit. Hit may be true, as Brer Jenkins says in his sermon, dat virtue is hits own reward. De Lawd knows hit ought to be, caze hit don't draw down no other dividend.

"Yassum, fo' mo' dan forty years I'se been a walkin' in de straight an' narrow way, a-tryin' to do what was right by my fambly, an' my neighbors, an' de po', an' de sick, an' de unfortunate, an' what has I got out of hit? Nothin'.

"Yassum, I'se done practiced de Golden Rule ontell I'se wore it to a frazzle. I'se fed de hungry, an' nussed de sick, an' shed barrels of tears wid dem dat wept, an' nobody ain't even noticed dat I done hit, let alone fling a few bokays at me for bein' a noble, Christian woman, an' a example to her sex. Yassum, ef you wants to git de reputation of bein' good, an' kind, an' generous, an' sweet, you wants to do about one good act a year, an' raise Cain de balance of de time.

"Furdermo', ef youse good all de time folks gits in de way of thinkin' dat you enjoys sacrificing yo'self, an' pickin' de bones after dey has et up all of de meat; an' when dey imposes on you dey feels lak you ought to be grateful to 'em for lettin' you enjoy yo' curis taste.

"Now, dere's my Aunt Hannah, what has got eleven chillen, not countin' de twins, what comes about fo' times a year and squats down on us an' crowds we-all outen our beds, an' into de wood-box, an' under de table to sleep. I sho'ly does have to do 'bout to hustle up enough bread an' meat to feed dat gang for a week; but you think my Aunt Hannah goes 'bout braggin' how hospitable I is, an' how proud she is, dat my do' is always on de latch so dat she can come in any time she takes de notion?

"Nawm, dat she don't. She don't pipe 'bout what I does for her, but when her odder niece, Elviry Ann, axes her over to tea, an' has a nickel's worth of lady fingers an' a box of sardines for supper she spends de balance of de time promulgatin' 'bout how kind an' thoughtful Elviry Ann is, an' she don't even remember dem fo' dollars' worth of po'k chops she's done gobbled up fo' me.

"An' den dere was Sally Maria, what I nussed through de fever, a-settin' up wid her nights on-tell I was dat wore out dat I was ready to drap in my tracks. You reckon Sally Maria is gwine around de neighborhood a-blowin' any trumpet, an' a-callin' me a ministerin' angel?

"Dat she ain't. She ain't got nary a word

to say 'bout what I done for her, but she fairly dribbles at de mouf wid gratitude when she tells how attentive Elder Sniggins was, who stopped as he was passin' de house an' axed over de fence how Sally was gettin' along.

"Yassum, I sho'ly is a good neighbor, ef I does say hit, what hadn't' ought to. Dere ain't a woman, 'round 'bout whar I lives, dat I ain't lent my best bonnet to, or accommodated wid a little coffee and sugar when times was hard, or dat I ain't helped git a drunken husband out of de calaboose, or dat I ain't showed how to dress a new-bawn baby, or shroud a dead one.

"But is you heard of anybody takin' up a subscription to build a monument to ole Mirandy? Nawm, I bet you ain't. I'se one of de women what deir friends remember when dey is in trouble, but when dey gives a party dey borry's her best chiny an' rock-chairs, an' den axes her to stay in de kitchen an' help serve de refreshments.

"An' hit ain't nowise different wid my family. You know dat when I sent Ma'y Jane off to dat cemetary to git de higher eddication, dat I inched an' pinched an' took in washin' an' wore my ole clothes to git de money; but you think dat gal appreciates what I done for her? Nawm. She thinks dat de reason dat I eats de neck an' de

back of de chicken, an' lets her have de white meat, is becaze I likes dem de best, and dat I wuks 'bout fourteen hours a day becaze I done got de habit an' can't break myself of hit.

"Yassum, dat's de way hit goes wid de chillen, an' I ain't never seed one of dese noble, onselfish mothers, dat give up everything for her chillen, dat didn't end deir days in de po'house becaze dere warn't no room for 'em in deir sons and daughters flats.

"An' dere's Ike. For thuty years I'se been a good an' faithful wife to Ike, an' I'se wuked my fingers to de bone to help keep de pot a-bilin', an' I'se been neat an' cheerful an' economical; but I ain't never seed Ike rise yet in de meetin' an' give in his testimony when Brer Jenkins axed dem to stand up what had knowed a perfect wife.

"Nawm, de only man dat I ever meets dat is always tellin' what a fine wife he has got is Sim Johnsing, what is married to a no-count, triflin' woman dat is too lazy to git up an' git breakfast mo' dan twice a year—but when she does hit, my land, but it tickles Sim so dat he spends de balance of de time miratin' over how industrious an' thoughtful she is.

"Yassum, dat's what makes me say what I

do. Dat ef you wants to git de reputation for bein' good you des wants to do a kind act mighty seldom. Den de occasionalest of hit will kinder attract attention to hit.

"Hit don't pay to be meek, an' onselfish, an' patient, an' obligin' ev'y day; an' dat's de reason I's gwine to change.

"Yessum, dare's goin' to be a b-a-a-d woman 'roun' here, dat's gwine to eat de breast of de chicken, an' take de first drippin's of de coffee pot, an' dat's gwine to wear de best clothes in de fambly, an' take de rollin' pin to her husband an' de broomstick to her chillen an' make 'em stand 'round, an' de forgiven' name of dat woman is gwine to be Mirandy.

"You hear me? I'se a-talkin'!"

XXX

Christmas

“ ‘WELL, Sis Mirandy,’ says Sis Araminty to me de odder day, ‘de merry Chris-mas-tide is almos’ upon us.’

“ ‘Dat’s so,’ I spons. ‘Whenever yer sees a woman wid a wild look in her eye floppin’ up an’ down de aisles of a departmen’ store lak a chicken wid hit’s haid cut off, or you notice dat mos’ of yo’ lady frien’s is dat worn out an’ narvous dat dey jumps when yer speaks to ’em, (an’ has de jineral appearance of havin’ jes’ been through a long spell of sickness,) you don’t need nobody to tell you dat Chris’mas is comin’.

“ ‘Dem am signs of Chris’mas dat never fails, for ef dere is any one thing dat’s mo’ wearin’ on de constitution dan anythin’ else, hit is tryin’ to spread fo’ dollars an’ seventy-five cents over de Chris’mas presents for forty-leven people, an’ git somethin’ for each one of ’em dat’ll look lak hit cost forty-seven dollars an’ fifty cents. (Hit ain’t no wonder to me dat hit runs folks batty,

an' I bet dat ef we knowed whut de mos' of de folks in de bug-house was doin', we'd find out dat dey was a beatin' deir hails up against de padded walls, an' a sayin', "Whut'll I git dat'll be a sweet remembrance of dis happy Chris'mas for Uncle Simon, an' Aunt Sue, an' Cousin Maria, an' little Willie, an' all my in-laws, whut ain't gwine to lak whut I gits 'em, no matter whut hit is?"

(" 'Yes, Sis Araminty,' I goes on, 'hit ain't no wonder to me dat reason topples on hit's throne, as Bro Jinkins says, when we starts out to spend de money we can't afford, buyin' Chris'mas pres-ents for dem as don't want 'em.' I finds myself goin' roun' in circles, a tryin' to decide whedder hit would be mos' appropriate to persent my Aunt Matildy, whut's been bed ridden for de las' ten years wid a misery in her back, wid a safety razor, or a umbrella, (as a slight token of how I thought of her at dis blessed season.)

" 'Dat's de true word,' spons Sis Araminty; hit suttinly am curis de way yo' mind wuks at Chris'mas. All de balance of de yeah I can remember de tastes an' needs of my friends, an' my fambly, but when I starts out to buy a Chris'-mas gift I dest loses my rabbit foot, an' I can't recollect, to save my life, whut a single soul laks.

An' for dat reason I dest pitches in to de bargain counter an' fights wid de odder women over de fust thing I gits my hands on, an' de pusson dat I sends hit to, wid my love, on Chris'mas mawnin' spends de balance of de yeah hatin' me, an' hopin' dat I'll git run over by a automobile, or somethin', befo' nex Chris'mas.'

" 'Hit's my opinion,' says I, 'dat Chris'mas is de time dat all of yo' enemies takes to git even wid you, an' to do de things dat dey don't dast to do de balance of de year. I tell you, Sis Araminty, dat when I sets down an' looks at my Chris'mas gifts I am filled wid a deep, dark suspicion. You needn't tell me dat dat cat of a Eudory Johnsing warn't a castin' asparagus on my figger, which is built after de pattern of a fedder bed instid of a telefoam post, when she sent me one of dese heah fancy belts whut I couldn't much mo' dan git aroun' my arm, let alone my waist.

" 'An' I'se had my eye on dat fliberty-jibberty Gladys Maude Gwendolyn Jones, whut's always a shinin' 'roun' my ole man Ike, sense she done sent me a Chris'mas gift of a pair of ole lady's shoes de whilst she's got on dem jay-bird heel slippers. Lakwise I'se been wonderin' ef Bro' Jinkins was a promulgatin' anythin' mo' dan de

compliments of de season, when he sent me on Chris'mas mawnin' a book wid de entitlement of "De Art of Silence, or How to Rule by Gentle-ness," a well knowin' dat I is a lady whut is got de full use of my tongue, an' dat when me an' Ike has any little fambly argyment, I puts my faith in de rollin' pin an' de flatiron.

"An' furdemo', Sis Araminty, his Chris'mas gift kind of shakes yo' faith in de husband of yo' bosom. For why, I wants to know, does Ike up an' persent me wid a new cook stove an' set of washin' tubs, ef hit warn't a kind of a hint to me dat I warn't a lady love no mo', but dest a performer on dem instruments? I lay dat ef he had a sent me a Chris'mas present of a cookin' stove an' a wash tub as a Chris'mas gift befo' we was married dere wouldn't have been no weddin', an' I would have busted dem over his haid."

"I ain't a tryin' to account for de curis pecularities of husbands, which is de mos' ondis-kivered nation of people dere is," says Sis Araminty, 'but one of de strangest things 'bout 'em is dat befo' you is married to one of 'em he can always remember dest whut you would lak to have for a Chris'mas gift, an' he'll break his neck to git hit for you, an' after you is married to him he never can call to mind anything dat you has



"I pins my faith to the rolling pin."

spressified yerself as wantin', an' de onliest way dat you can corkscrew a Chris'mas gift out of him at all is by remindin' him ev'y mawnin' for six months befo'hand dat dey is gwine to celebrate Chris'mas on de 25th of December dis year.

" 'By doin' dat, ef you'se got energy enough, you can wuk him up to de pint whar a week befo' Chris'mas he'll throw a dollar in yo' lap, an' say for you to go an' git yo'self a Chris'mas present, dat he don't know whut you want, an dat you couldn't hire him to resk his life in one of dem apartment sto'es.'

" 'Sis Araminty,' says I, 'I don't know nothin' dat is mo' calkilated to bust up love's young dream dan de way yo' husband acts at Chris'mas time. Why, heah I've been a discousin' to Ike for de las' six months on de subject of dese heah weepin' willer fedders, which I suttinly does hone after, but you reckon dot man is gwine to have gumption enough to take dat hint dat I knocks him down wid ev'y mawnin' at breakfas', an' surprise me wid one of dem fedders for a Chris'mas gif'?

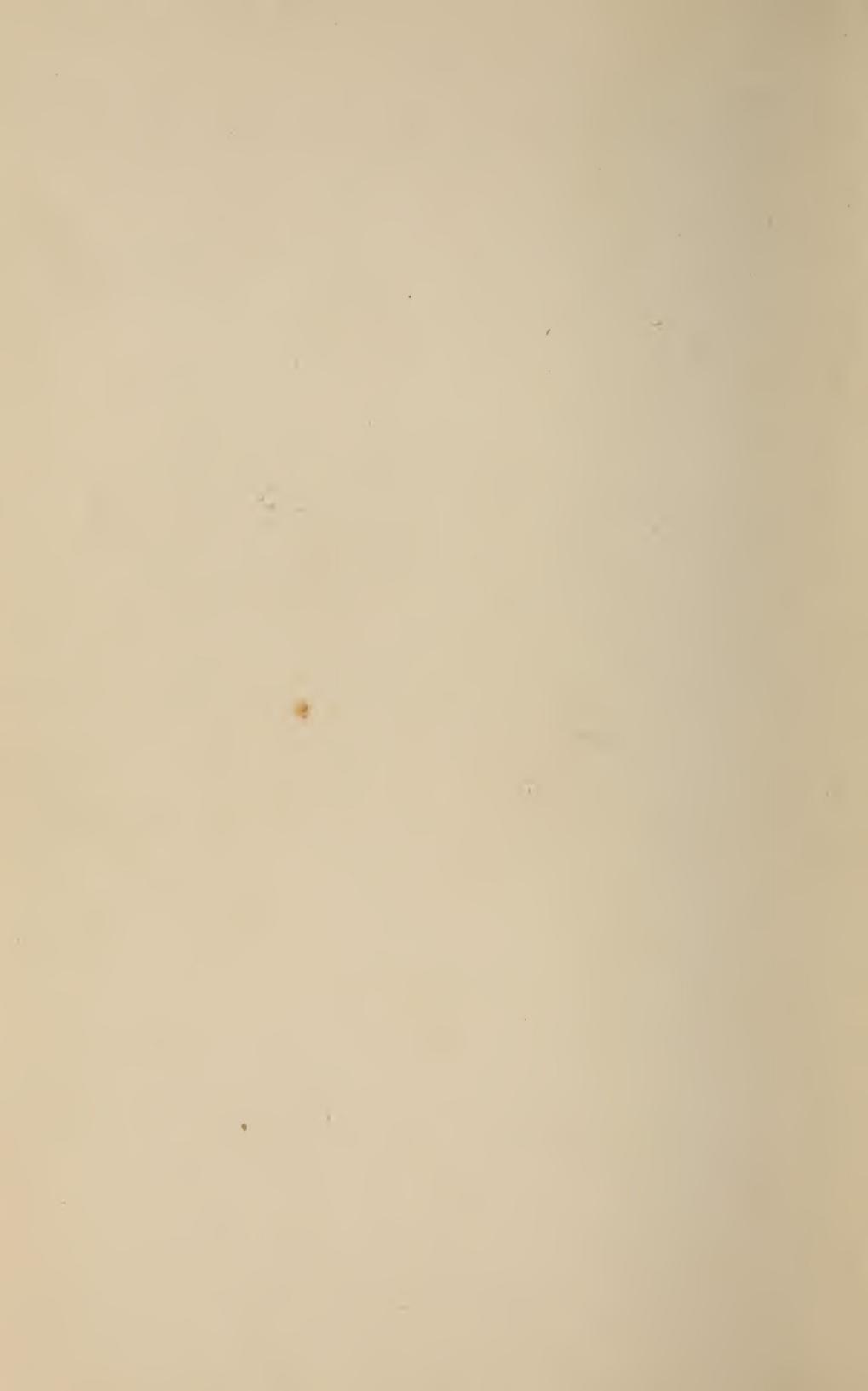
" 'Nawm. Hit's dollars to doughnuts dat he'll come smirkin' in wid a red flannel petticoat or a set of union underwear fo' my Chris'mas gif', an' den be mad becaze I don't throw fits of gratitude,

an' say how was he to know dat I wanted a weepin' willer fedder.'

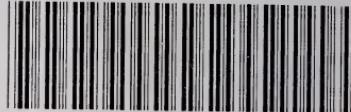
" 'An' yet,' says Sis Araminty, 'who would do widout Chris'mas if dey could, no matter ef deir friends did send 'em embroidered whut-you-may-call-'ems dat dey don't know de name of nor whut dey is for?'

" 'Maybe so,' I spons, 'for I notices dat ev'y year at Chris'mas time I swears off agivin' or receivin' Chris'mas presents, an' dat at 'bout dis time I begins to hant de sto'es, an' run aroun' wid de odder women alookin' for I-don't-know-whut to give to I-don't-know-who. But dere's de Lawd's mercy in one thing—dat Chris'mas don't come but once a year.' "

THE END



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